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A SHORT HISTORY OF WOMEN'S LIBERATION BY BARBARA WINSLOW

REVOLUTIONARY FEMINISM

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REVOLUTIONARY FEMINISM

Sisters, don't say you can't do anything...
No more lack of confidence
No more hesitation
Let us ask ourselves clearly this question,
What do we want?
We want total and complete liberation.

Let them mock us, a day will come when they
will no longer laugh
Is this day far away?
What does it matter.
We will have difficulty, suffering, struggles.
Happiness will be for our sisters,
for the women born after us.

Women reply to men who ask, 'What do you want?
What are you trying to do?'
'We want to reconstruct a new world with you,
where peace and truth will reign, we want justice
in every spirit, and love in every heart.'
La Voix des Femmes, March 28, 1848

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INTRODUCTION

Women's liberation has changed America—women will never be the same again. The passivity, the apathy, the post World War II images of women, ranging from prom queens and cheer leaders, to prosperous housewives and mothers, with new station wagons full of kids—all this, thankfully, is gone.

In the late 1960's, following the long period of economic prosperity, during which women increasingly were forced from political and economic activity, women once again began to stand up and fight back. In numbers reaching the millions, women marched, rallied, protested—they demanded full job and educational equality, child care, an end to forced sterilizations, the right to free, quality abortions.

The movement was not just American, of course, it was and is international. And there have been victories. Women have won the legalization of abortion, the right to work in previously all male jobs, new child care provisions, and advances in sexual freedom.

Just as importantly, the women's liberation movement changed ideas about women. Today, even though the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) is not law, most Americans believe that women are in fact deserving of equal rights, an irony of course in a country which calls itself democratic, but important all the same.

The change is much deeper, however. Women can also demand defense against rape, including the right to self-defense; lesbians can openly fight for the custody of their own children; women can organize collectively and independently for their own rights—in unions, schools and universities, neighborhoods and workplaces. The development of the gay liberation movement is also connected to the fight for women's liberation. Women today have a new sense of identity and purpose, they have a new commitment, and an understanding of their potential power in society.

This pamphlet was first written in 1971, at the height of the radical phase of the women's movement. It attempted to fill one very important gap in the consciousness of the movement—its own history. Unlike movements in the past, the women's movement of the 1960's and 1970's had very little knowledge of its own past and traditions. It was cut off from its predecessors, mainly by the conservative, anti-communist years of the 1950's, in much the same way that the entire new left was rootless.

Yet, it must be obvious that women's liberation did not begin in the 1960's. It is part of a tradition, a chain of struggle with links going back to the great French Revolution of 1789—even earlier. In fact, most of the important debates of the movement of the 1960's have been thrashed out before—at women's rights conferences, in trade union meetings, in the socialist movement.

Since 1971 vast amounts have been published on the subject of women, but unfortunately, because the whole movement and climate has become more conservative, very little of it has to do with the radical and revolutionary women's movement. And very little of it attempts to answer the fundamental questions which I believe still face the movement. I hope this pamphlet can still be useful, therefore, both in providing some important historical background, and in giving some direction for the future.

I will argue here that much of the true history of women's liberation has been hidden from history. In the early years of the new women's movement, for example, the enemies of the movement tried to divide black women from white women. They said that women's liberation was for middle class white

women only. But nothing could be farther from the truth. It was out of the abolition movement (the fight against slavery in the nineteenth century) that the women's rights movement in this country was first forged. Black women played a leading role in that movement, as they do in today's movement. This should be no surprise, for black women have the most to gain in liberation—as they have the least to lose from today's system. The majority of black women face triple oppression—as women, as workers, and as the victims of racism.

Working women are also written out of history, yet they have been a driving force in the women's movement—from the Lowell mill girls of the 1840's, who formed the first working women's organization, right down to the Farah strikers and the Brookside Women's Club. The Farah strikers made a national issue out of the outrageous treatment of the mainly Mexican/American garment workers of El Paso. The Brookside women fought bloody battles with modern-day gun thugs and state troopers in Harlan County, in an effort to help the Brookside miners win union recognition.

I will also argue that women's liberation cannot be separated from the fight for socialism. Neither can it be subordinated to that fight. Women can and must organize independently, as they have done in every great upsurge of struggle. Today, however, there is a strong anti-socialist current in the women's movement. It is a very dangerous current, especially if one believes, as I do, that there will be no women's liberation as long as capitalism exists. The system is based above all else on inequality and exploitation. The nuclear family, its institution for the reproduction of the working class, is essential to the system's survival. The oppression of women, consequently, is part of the rock upon which the whole system is built.

At the same time, women have an ally in revolutionary socialism. The revolutionary movement has championed women's liberation more consistently and steadfastly than any other movement. Part of the problem today is that it is not always very clear what socialism is, and what it is not. I would argue that there are no socialist countries today, and neither are there any nations where women are liberated. Nevertheless, I believe that socialism is still the best hope for

the future, and I think that a look at the history of our movement will show that the most valiant, the most courageous fighters for women's emancipation have been revolutionary socialists.

But first, we should start with some definitions. The words "feminism" and "women's liberation" are often used interchangably. And because there have always been different ideas within the women's movement, the definitions—and the various trends that they represent—are all important.

Feminism is the awareness of the special oppression and exploitation that all women face—because they are women. Feminism is also the commitment to organize and fight against the oppression of women in society. Men can be—and have been—feminists. But men cannot hand us our freedom. It will only be through our own struggles, our own efforts, that our emancipation will be won.

But there is more than one definition of feminism. I believe there are three main currents of feminism within the women's movement. One is reform feminism. This is the belief that formal or legal equality can be won for women without fundamentally changing the existing society. Today, reform feminism is best expressed by the National Organization for Women (NOW) and the National Women's Political Caucus. It is the strongest political current within the women's movement. Reform feminists believe that the fight for women's equality should be waged within the laws and institutions of the capitalist system. They urge women to join the Democratic and Republican Parties.

The best example of reform feminism in practice was the National Women's Convention in Houston, Texas, in late 1977. There, thousands of women who consider themselves to be dedicated champions of women's rights cheered Roslyn Carter, Betty Ford, and Lady Bird Johnson. It was only too bad that Pat Nixon and Jackie Kennedy Onassis weren't there as well. The elevation of the presidents' wives only highlighted the co-optation of a big part of our movement—and the hypocrisy of proposing that women can win their rights inside the twin parties of modern American imperialism.

Some women will benefit, of course, but they will be the

handful of politicians, elitists, and careerists who organized the convention. They may even win reform for a wider section of middle class women. The majority will win nothing.

The second current of feminism is separatism. Separatist feminism is the belief that the conflict between men and women represents the most fundamental division within society. They argue that exploitation, racism, poverty, and war, all ultimately stem from man's biological power over woman. As the very concept of separation implies, of course, separatist feminists do not want an egalitarian society. Instead, they want a solution to the oppression of women separate from men.

Reform feminists and separatist feminists have one important characteristic in common. They both believe that the question of women's liberation can be separated from the social system and class society. How else can we explain the coming together of separatists and reformists at the Houston Convention—a convention which was in the last analysis bought and paid for by men—the men in Congress.

At best separatism is utopian, as seen in the self-help collectives which hope to create small islands of liberation in the vast sea of oppression. At worst, however, separatist feminism, like reform feminism, becomes conservative, racist, and anti-woman. It argues, after all, that a black woman has more in common with her white "sister" in the "big house" than she does with her husband, brother, or son in the field. And it argues that the Brookside women have more to share with the women stockholders and wives of stockholders in Duke Power Company than with the male coal miners. And that there is no fundamental divide between Lady Bird Johnson and the poor peasant women of Vietnam.

The final trend in the feminist movement is what I call revolutionary feminism. It begins with the belief that the fight for women's liberation is linked with the struggle against capitalism and the historic struggle of the working class for its own emancipation.

I think that one simple statistic makes this case. In the United States today, two percent of the population owns and controls 85 percent of the wealth. The tendency is for this

wealth to become increasingly concentrated, that is, held in ever fewer hands. How can there ever be equality for women, who are 53 percent of the population, in this system?

According to one government report, equal pay for women, one of the most basic reforms necessary if women are to be equal, is economically impossible. It would cost the U.S. government and the corporations of this country $80 billion to give women workers in the United States equal pay for one year alone. Jimmy Carter's proposed 1978 budget is $126 billion in total!

And that is just the beginning. Where will we get the money for free abortions, who will pay for birth control? There is certainly the potential wealth in this country to begin to pay for these—as well as for quality child care centers, equal education, and all the rest. A look at the arms budget alone shows that. But the fact is that as long as the productive capacity is organized to profit a small handful of men and women, there will be no such programs.

The beginning of long term economic stagnation and decline makes reform even less likely. Already abortion for the poor has been denied—in one of the first of many attacks on the rights we won in the 1960's and 1970's. At the same time, while individual women have won important gains in employment opportunity, the longer term trends have been against women. In the past 20 years, the wage gap between men and women has actually grown wider. In 1956, women earned 63% of what men earned. In 1970, the fiftieth anniversary of woman suffrage, women's earnings fell to 59%. Then, by 1976, they had fallen to just 57%.

All indications are that as economic conditions deteriorate, inequality for women will increase. Women are unemployed at a higher rate than men. Black women suffer twice the jobless rate of white women, and teenage women are unemployed at a rate double that of older women. Black teenage females have the highest unemployment rate of any group in the country—a staggering 43% without jobs.

The poorest also suffer the most. In 1974, the majority of families living below the poverty level were headed by women who were the sole breadwinner. Now, the picture is threatening for even that minority of women who won new

jobs in the 1960's. The last major recession, 1974-1975, showed the fragility of women's advancements. Almost all the women hired into basic industry on the basis of equal opportunity struggles were laid off. The women were the last hired. They were therefore the first fired. Now there is a legal offensive against equal opportunities for women and blacks, including the as yet undecided Bakke case. Alan Bakke, a 37 year old white man has won a "reverse discrimination" suit in the California Supreme Court, arguing he was rejected from medical school in favor of a "less qualified" minority student. Yet, what does a glance at the American medical profession show? It is a privileged club for white men.

The economic crisis also hits hardest at the traditional occupations of women—service, the city jobs, white collar jobs, teachers, hospital workers, clerical workers. And with this there is an actual decline in unionization among women—where holding a union card can mean an additional $1500 to $2000 a year on average.

All this adds up to a serious situation for women and for the women's movement. It is made worse by the fact that a small, but increasingly aggressive anti-women, right wing movement is growing. Anita Bryant has launched a fanatical campaign against homosexuals. Phyllis Schlafly hopes to defeat the Equal Rights Amendment, and she may be successful. Anti-abortion laws are being proposed in cities all across the country. In Cleveland, Ohio, in February, 1978, anti-abortionists first raided and wrecked an abortion clinic, even as operations were in progress, then returned to burn the clinic down.

Yet, feminism remains a very powerful movement in this country, far more influential than the right-wing and potentially strong enough to defend abortion rights, the rights of gays, the rights to jobs and even against the attacks of the courts and Congress.

Part of the problem is one of orientation. The decline of the radical movement has had its effect on the women's movement. Increasingly, the movement has steered away from direct action, away from a commitment to genuine liberation, and toward respectibility, toward lobbying the Con-

gress, and pleading with the courts.

Revolutionary feminism is the alternative. As I hope I will show, it is not a utopian strategy for the future. It begins with defending what we have won. Abortion is just one issue, though it is a very important one. There are many others-child care, gay rights, jobs, wages, health and welfare benefits. We will have to fight now on these and many more issues. But revolutionary feminism also begins with rejecting the idea that women should fight for equality within this system—a system which is based on war, racist, poverty, and brutal exploitation, here in the United States and throughout the world.

We must fight to link women's struggles with the struggles of others, particularly with black and Third World movements, but also with the working class movement in its entirety. The argument that women must organize independently is central for revolutionary feminists, but it can sometimes miss the point. Women must have organizations, but we cannot remove ourselves from the struggles of other oppressed and expolited people. We must be independent, not of the working class movement, but of the capitalist institutions, ideas, parties, laws and politicians, all of which conspire to maintain the subjugation of women.

We must also fight for the ideas of revolutionary socialism within the women's movement, for women will not win their liberation alone. It is only a working class revolution and a working class revolutionary party that can break capitalism—a party which unites the struggles of the specially oppressed with the struggle of the working class. The struggles must be linked, that is the whole point of revolutionary feminism. Women must fight our own struggles, we must fight for our own organizations, just as blacks must, but women must also make a priority of joining to build a genuine revolutionary worker's party—to organize and lead the fight for international socialism.

I hope that this pamphlet can still help to build that movement, at least by uncovering bits of our history which have been hidden or forgotten. We need examples and inspiration.

No one should think that all the great battles are in the past

however. To see the fantastic potential power of women, their capacity to change, to organize, to fight back, we need look no further than Elwood, Indiana, a small factory town northeast of Indianapolis. There, 180 strikers, mainly women, some of them grandmothers, fought a bloody eight-month battle with one of the nations' corporate giants—United Technologies.

The women struck Essex Wire, a subsidiary of United Technologies, because they wanted more than a few cents above the minimum wage, they wanted some basic benefits, and most importantly, because they were "tired of being treated like slaves."

They were attacked on their picket lines by state troopers with clubs and company goons with guns. Guards systematically fired into their lines. One young striker, Carol Frye, was shot. She remains paralyzed to this day, with a company bullet lodged in her spine. Still, the women fought back. They won national support. And it was only after their own union, the United Auto Workers, totally betrayed them, that they returned to work.

One of the strike leaders, Georgia Ellis, a woman who is still fighting for the Essex workers, summed up the experience of the strikers this way:

"We gained a lot of strength and self respect. We learned the strength of being together—a closeness we never had before. Our values changed. Before, for most of us, our own personal lives were the most important thing—and that paycheck.

"Now we know that our only strength is in each other. We learned respect for each other and dignity. We learned a lot about other people's problems in the labor movement. We learned we can't trust the union officials, but we have to trust the union of each other.

"I still believe in the principles of unionism. I want to say that. We're determined to save this local and build it with the unity we got through the strike. We were not defeated. We've learned a lot and we know what we're up against and we've got a better idea how to fight it now."

THE BEGINNING

Before the beginning of modern industrial society, there were no women's liberation movements. This was not because women led happy, comfortable or rewarding lives. Women in the pre-capitalist world led lives of fear, famine and superstition. They died in childbirth or watched most of their children die from disease and overwork.

But peasant life did not allow for or create the possibility of ending this oppression. Women had an important role in feudal society.They were a necessary part of an economic unit, but there was really no alternative available to them. Furthermore, the social organization of peasant life—isolated households in the countryside or in small villages—prevented women from seeing their oppression as anything more than an individual problem and certainly made it impossible for them to see a collective solution.

Even though a women's liberation movement could not spring up in the pre-capitalist period, there still was resistance by women. Joan of Arc was a general in an army of national liberation. She was burned at the stake, not for being a successful soldier, but because she wore her hair short and dressed in male attire. She was condemned and executed for being a witch.

There are other examples of scattered protest. In 1640 in England, Mary Tattle-well and Joan Hit-em-Home wrote **The Women's Sharpe Revenge,** where they vehemently argued against the double standard of sexual morality and the lack of education permitted women.

Mary and Joan's cries were isolated and sporadic. However, they were joined by other women as a new form of society developed. The rise of industrialism and capitalism transformed the lives of women and men in such a way as to make new forms of protest—a women's liberation movement possible.

Capitalism changed both the old forms of the family, and the type of work that people did. Under feudal society, the family was the basic productive unit. In other words, the family produced all of its necessities for survival—its own home, food, clothing, education and leisure. Within the feudal family, the woman participated in the work necessary for the survival of the family. She was a necessary and useful person, as a mother, but also because she helped produce the necessities of life. But the family reproduced the hierarchical structure of feudal life, with women on the bottom. The family was the agency for the oppression of women.

Under capitalism, production no longer took place in the home, but in factories. All those people who worked in factories, who produced all the necessities of life, had no control over their places of work. They had to go to work when the factory owner told them to, eat lunch at an assigned time, and they couldn't go home when they were tired, but when the factory whistle gave permission.

The factory system had several effects on women. By removing work from the home, it prevented many women, the pregnant or aged, for example, from being able to participate in the productive life. For those women who did work, their subordinate position within the family was used to keep them in a subordinate position at work. They got the worst jobs at the worst pay. Their special oppression as women forced them to be super-exploited as workers. Women went down into the mines and off to the mills, never to see the sunshine as slaves for their new masters. For this they brought home a few pennies for their families, only to be slaves to their fathers and husbands.

While woman's life was being brutally changed from a peasant to an industrial one, capitalism created the seeds of its own destruction and of the destruction of women's oppression. First of all, industrial capitalism drove women out of the home into the factories, thus creating a female work force. Women could become more independent than under feudal society. But more important, women worked together in the factories, were exploited together by the same boss, and in turn responded against their working conditions in a collective way. As we shall see, it was the labor

struggles of these working women—part of the general working class movement that grew up in opposition to capitalist misery—that laid the basis for a strong women's movement.

Working class women were not the only victims of capitalism. Society made women of the new ruling class—those mothers, wives and daughters of the capitalists—totally parasitical, and therefore totally useless, people. These women were placed upon a pedestal—a pedestal which made it impossible for them to think and act as a person. A pedestal which deprived them, as well as working class women, of any legal rights. A pedestal which kept their minds and bodies trapped and paralyzed. The ruling class woman could only be a baby-maker and an ornament for her husband.

The ideology of the "perfect" woman was, however, just part of the disgusting hypocrisy of capitalist society. Ruling class men and women shed few tears for black slave women who were brutally overworked, beaten and raped; or for a working class woman who went down into the mines or worked 14 hours a day in the mills. They were not glorified by capitalist society but brutally exploited.

It was the reaction by both classes of women to their new found position that created the early feminist movement. Ruling class women fought to be freed from their parasitical existence. Working class women fought for an end to their exploitation as workers in the factories, their oppressive position within the family and society at large. Although these women had some common interests in combatting the oppression they both faced as women, they had different class aims. To end their oppression, working class women had to turn against the capitalist system which exploited them and their husbands, fathers and brothers. Women from the ruling class, on the other hand, lived off of this exploitation, and every time the struggle of women began to challenge capitalist relations, these women chose their class interests, and abandoned and opposed the working women's movement.

The emergence of the new industrial society brought about a new political system as well—a political system introduced by revolution. It was the political as well as the economic revolution that kindled the feminist fires.

During the English revolution of the 17th century, the first women's voices were heard. Women demanded the right to participate in political and religious activity. If the new ideas that were being discussed included the equality of mankind before God and the law, why not womankind as well, wrote women petitioning the English Parliament in 1642. "Women are sharers in the common calamities that accompany both Church and Commonwealth, when oppression is exercized over the Church or Kingdom wherein they live; and an unlimited power has been given to prelates to exercise over the consciences of women as well as men."

In the United States, the war for national independence from England brought about ideas concerning women's equality. Two women, Mercy Warren and Abigail Adams, raised the issue of women's rights when the Constitution was written. Abigail Adams wrote her husband John:

"...in the new code of laws...I desire you would remember the ladies and be more generous and favorable to them than your ancestors. Do not put such unlimited power in the hands of the husbands. Remember all men would be tyrants if they could, if particular care and attention is not paid to the ladies, we are determined to foment a rebellion and will not hold ourselves bound by any laws in which we have no voice or representation."

John Adams disagreed with his wife. His reply is not only important because of his flip dismissal of a reasonable demand, but it sheds light on how "revolutions," in this case, a fight for national independence, challenge all assumptions about who should rule and who should be slave:

"As to your extraordinary code of laws I cannot but laugh. We have been told that our struggle has loosened the bonds of government everywhere; that children and apprentices were disobedient; that schools and colleges were grown turbulent; that Indians slighted their guardians and Negroes grew insolent to their masters. But your letter was the first intimation that another tribe, more numerous and powerful than all the rest, were grown turbulent."(1)

Women did not get the vote in the United States until 1920. The writings of Adams and Warren went unnoticed for almost fifty years.

It was, however, the French revolution of 1789 which gave birth to the women's liberation movement. And upheavals by the working class and movements of women fighting for equality went hand in hand as women got involved in activity, whether it was fighting in the streets to free political prisoners, to lower the price of bread, or change oppressive laws, they always came up against their particular oppression as women. In response, they formed their own organizations and movements, which fought alongside others. During periods of social upheaval, women, like other oppressed groups, can see a better vision for the future. Because of this, they fight to end their oppression.

Prior to the actual revolution, women played a central role in the revolutionary movement. They had been involved in all the popular agitation in Paris against the high cost of food. They were the backbone of the street committees that eventually stormed the Bastille and started the fight for liberty. It was the women of Paris who marched to Versailles, and brought back the King and Queen to face the Paris crown. In the streets, women participated as equals with men. The women's newspaper, **Journal des Dames,** did not exaggerate when it proclaimed in 1791 that "women had set men free."

The French revolution brought to light the demands and needs of the middle class as well as working class women. The most articulate expression of the interests of the middle class women was found in Olympe de Gouges, who wrote a pamphlet entitled "The Rights of Women." Here she argued that "This revolution will not be completed until all women are conscious of their deplorable lot and of the rights they have lost in society." She went on to prove that women should be given equality with men in the economic and political world. Her final words were to call out for all women to unite in order to regain their rights as equals to men.

In 1792 another leader of the revolution, Madame Etta Palm Aelder, presented the legislative assembly a series of demands that also expressed the needs of middle class women; equal education, voting rights, property, and laws making divorce easier. Many of the reforms were partially granted in the first years of the revolution.

As middle class women were asserting their rights as

equals to their husbands, they were supported by working class women. However, the women of the working class found it necessary to form revolutionary organizations which defended and fought for their rights as women and as workers. The women from the working class found themselves the staunchest defenders of the revolution, for it meant their lives.

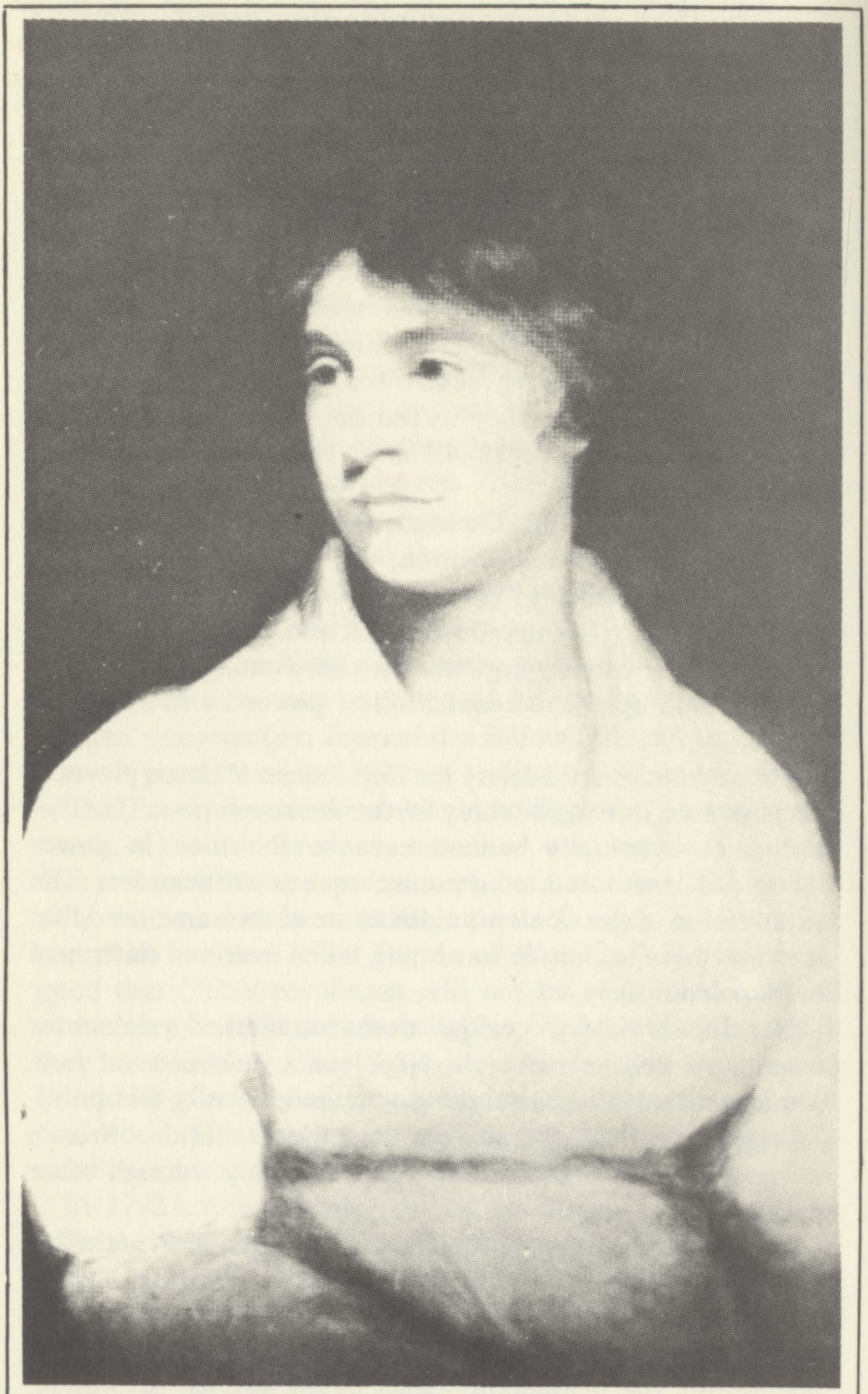
Working class women often initiated bold activities during the revolution. In July 1792, women asked the assembly for permission to arm themselves to defend Paris from invasion. In Lyons, women actually seized control of city government for three days. There they forced the Municipal Council of Lyons to begin the process of a more equal food distribution service.

In 1793, working class women founded the first radical women's liberation organization, the Society of Republican Women. The women in the society went far beyond the demands raised by Olympe de Gouges and Etta Palm Aelder. These French women argued that the winning of women's rights rested upon the acquisition of power by the working class.

The revolutionary Society for Republican Women played a decisive role during its short life in the revolution. The Society was eventually banned because the men in power thought it constituted too great a threat to public order. The suppression of the women's clubs came at the same time that the revolution in France was being taken over and destroyed by Napoleon.(2)

Napoleon's victory over the revolution marked a defeat for women as well as men. In Napoleon's new code of law, women were denied the right to vote and lost all other political rights they had won as a result of the revolution. French women would win back their rights but only through other upheavals.

The French revolution brought about the first activities and organizations of women fighting for their rights. It also produced the first major feminist theorist, Mary Wollstonecraft. Wollstonecraft was an Englishwoman who had been inspired by the democratic ideals of the French revolution. She had read Thomas Paine's tract about revolution, **Vindica-**



Mary Wollstonecraft

tion of the Rights of Men, which prompted her to defend the revolution and the rights of women. In 1793 the first major feminist book, **A Vindication of the Rights of Women,** was published amid an uproar of disapproval.

In her book, Wollstonecraft argued against the unequal educational opportunities open for women. She stated that it was criminal for a society to enslave women's minds and bodies, because doing so crippled all of society. She stressed that women should have full legal and civil rights. Moreover, women must be allowed to be more than just wives and baby-makers. They must be given the opportunity to play a productive role in society.

A Vindication of the Rights of Women was not received well when it first came out. Many people denounced it for being far too radical. A woman's place was in the home after all, not reading such dangerous words!

However, in spite of the fear by men about the potential danger of the book, her **Vindication** did not in fact go far enough in pointing out the way for women's liberation. Wollstonecraft bitterly and brilliantly described the suffering and humiliation of women in society; however, she didn't understand why this took place. Her vision of change was limited to women of her class—artisan and middle class women. That is why her book concentrated solely upon education and reform. She didn't ever discuss the position of women within the family and the exploitation of working women.

Nevertheless, in spite of the shortcomings, Wollstonecraft was the first feminist to capture the anger and rage of women. The **Vindication** was also important as the first major piece of feminist writing that argued that women's emancipation led the way for liberation of all humanity.

UNITED STATES

Feminism as a political movement first appears in the United States and Europe with the emergence of social movements between about 1820 to 1840. Women throughout the capitalist world were beginning to fight back against their oppression. In America, the earliest feminists had also been participants in other social reform movements, in particular, the temperance (anti-alcohol) and abolition movements. The earliest feminists in the United States were from the middle classes. These women tended to come from professional liberally minded families who had encouraged their daughters to read and think. It was not surprising, therefore, that so many of these women would rebel against a society which so confined their lives.

Because the women were from the middle class, their initial demands reflected their class position. Their demands centered upon equal access to professions: law, medicine, theology; the right to hold property, to keep one's own earnings; the right to sue and be sued in courts; and the right to be tried by a jury of one's peers and to sit on juries. Women demanded equal education for women at all levels. The early feminists also took up social questions such as more liberal marriage and divorce laws. Clothing reform was important for these early feminists. During the 19th century "proper" women were expected to wear over 40 pounds of uncomfortable clothing. Shoes were too tight, corsets laced women into an unhealthy and uncomfortable 19 and 20-inch waistline. When feminists adopted pantaloons or the "bloomer" costume, there were merely exercising their right to be comfortable.

Some women wanted more than just legal rights within society. They wanted to build a different type of society where men, women and children could live together in equality and peace. Many of these women were among the found-

ers of the Utopian settlements, small areas of land where men and women tried to build a heaven on earth.

Frances Wright, a Scotswoman, was one of the most famous Utopians. She was an advocate of women's rights, as well as of the rights of black people. She had been impressed with some of the Utopian settlements in Ohio and Indiana, and attempted to build one in Nashoba, Tennessee.

Her plan was very ambitious. Wright, an opponent of slavery, hoped her colony would enable freed blacks and whites to live together in harmony. However, her plan, like all of the utopian settlements, collapsed. Nashoba couldn't stay economically independent, and people's attitudes towards each other were not harmonious, to say the least. Even though the settlers passed rules against marriage, against people "owning" other people, against behaving in ways that lead to prejudice and hate, the people of Nashoba could not escape from the world they lived in. The experience of Nashoba, like all of the Utopian settlements (as the hippie communes of today) showed that you can't create islands of perfection in the vast ocean of exploitation, oppression, poverty and war. The lessons from the Utopian experiments were clear. Woman cannot be emancipated by trying to create a "perfect" community apart from the world. Rather, it is necessary for the masses to take over the society, and to restructure it from top to bottom for women to be free.

In the United States, the women's movement was quite radical. The early radicalism was due in part to the early utopians who wanted a different kind of society. However, there was another and more important reason. The women's rights movement was itself as linked up with the struggle against slavery. All the leading feminists were militant abolitionists. They wanted slavery ended immediately, by any or all means. Throughout the period before the Civil War, women in the North compared their lot with that of their black sister and brother. They argued that freedom for women and freedom for blacks should go hand in hand. Angelina and Sarah Grimke, Susan Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, to name a few, were part of the underground railroad. Many of them had financially supported John Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry. Other women such as Prudence Cran-

dall risked their lives by setting up schools for black women. These women courageously braved hysterical mobs in the North as they fought for their right to hold meetings that black women could attend.

Many of the leading women in the women's rights movement were black. Sojourner Truth was the best known fighter for black and women's liberation. At a women's rights convention in Akron, Ohio, in 1851, she made the finest speech of the women's rights movement. The women at this conference had been speaking on why legal rights should be given to women. A number of clergymen were effectively heckling, arguing that women were too dainty and weak to have any rights; that they needed men to open doors for them and to lift them into carriages; that women didn't need rights for they were so protected and cherished. Sojourner Truth rose and in one speech ripped apart the vicious hypocrisy of those men:

"That man over there says that women need to be placed into carriages and lifted over ditches and they have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages and over puddles and gives me the best place. And ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted and gathered into barns and no man could head me and ain't I a woman! I could work as much and eat as much as any man—when I could get it—and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman! I have born thirteen children and seen most of them sold into slavery and when I cried out with my mother's grief none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman!"

After that speech, very few men talked about the inherent and God-ordained weaknesses of women.

Harriet Tubman, while not immediately involved in the women's rights movement, nevertheless was an example of women's liberation. She was known as the Moses of her people, for she was the most important general in the underground railroad. She led hundreds of slaves into freedom and "never lost a passenger." A ten thousand dollar reward was on her head, yet she bravely continued her work in the South and in the North.

Sara Douglas and Sara Redmond were Northern women

active in the female anti-slave societies. As a result of discrimination they faced as freed blacks and as women, they joined the women's rights societies that sprung up in the United States.

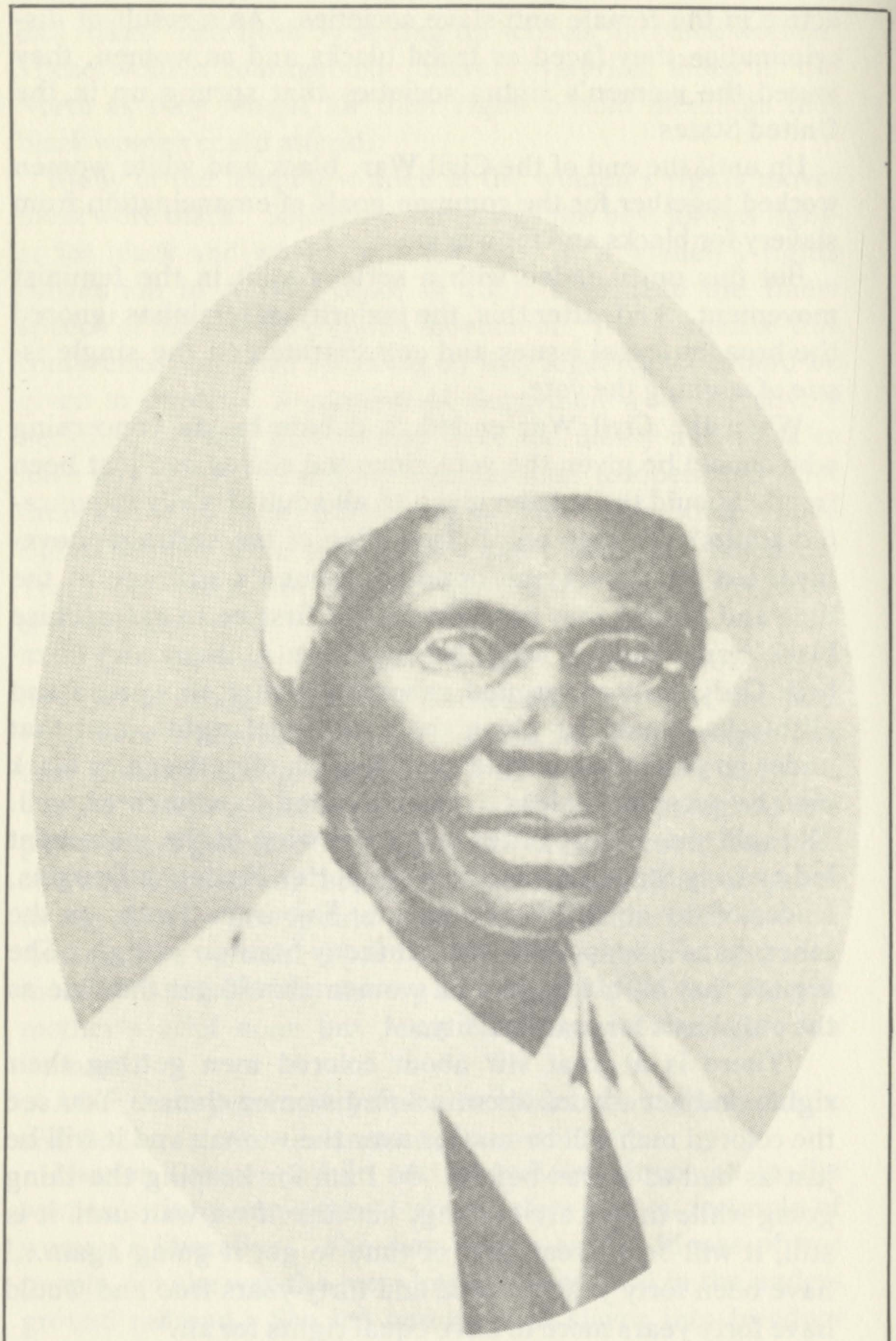
Up until the end of the Civil War, black and white women worked together for the common goals of emancipation from slavery for blacks and for women.

But this unity ended with a serious split in the feminist movement. And, after this, the majority of feminists ignored the broader social issues and concentrated on the single issue of winning the vote.

When the Civil War ended, a debate began concerning who should be given the vote since the slaves had just been freed. Should the vote be given to all adults? Only to educated adults? To men only? One wing of the suffrage movement led by Lucy Stone opposed women's suffrage at the time and argued that the fight should first be to enfranchise black men. Another wing, led by Susan Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, argued vehemently that all women and all blacks should be given their full legal rights, and that under no conditions should an extension of suffrage to black men be accepted unless it was extended to women as well. The split was a very bitter one. The wing of the movement led by Lucy Stone also had as a supporter Frederick Douglas, leader of the abolition movement. Sojourner Truth, on the other hand, supported the Anthony-Stanton wing. She argued that all blacks and all women should get the vote as the only basis for real equality:

"There is a great stir about colored men getting their rights and not a word about colored women theirs. You see the colored man will be master over the woman and it will be just as bad as it was before. So I am for keeping the thing going while things are stirring, because if we wait until it is still, it will be a great deal of time to get it going again...I have been forty years a slave and forty years free and would have forty years more to have equal rights for all."

This speech was important for it showed that equality could never be won at the expense of others. Also, Sojourner Truth accurately predicted what would happen if the abolitionists and feminists accepted a bill that would franchise



Sojourner Truth

men only. Black and white women had to wait another 50 years in order to have the right to vote. However, Stanton and Anthony were wrong for not supporting the 15th amendment. Rather, they should have supported any and all extensions of the franchise while continuing the fight for women's rights.

The division within the abolitionist and feminist movements was merely a symptom of greater political differences. In the late 1860's, after black men had gotten the vote, two rival suffrage organizations were formed. One, the American Woman Suffrage Association led by Lucy Stone, was comprised of wealthier, more conservative women. The American focused solely on the issue of woman suffrage, excluding and opposing other movements for social change.

The second organization, the National Women's Suffrage Association, led by Anthony and Stanton, was more radical. Its ranks consisted of women who tended to be poorer women, who worked mainly as school teachers and clerical workers. The National published a newspaper called **Revolution** which called for not just the vote but changes in all aspects of society. The National fought for the organization of women workers to fight for entrance into better paying jobs and to get better pay.

The split in the American women's movement was healed in the 1890's when the two groups formed as the National American Women's Suffrage Association (NAWSA). The merger marked the conservatization of the women's movement. NAWSA had become an organization of middle class women interested in winning the vote for themselves and little else. As we will see later, its class outlook made it hostile to the majority of working class and black women, to the emerging labor movement as well as other movements for social change.

What happened to NAWSA was not unique to the United States. There existed in all the feminist movements, especially after the 1880's, a division along class lines. One section of the women's movement was led by middle class women for middle class women. They fought for their rights as women to participate in that capitalist system. The other section of the women's movement was the working class and

revolutionary wing. Those were the women who were fighting for women's liberation from the horrors of capitalism through a workers' revolution.

WORKING WOMEN

Women who worked outside the home, in the factories, mills, offices and mines have also been part of the fight for women's liberation.

In America, for example, in the 1820's and 30's, women who worked in the textile mills in Lowell, Massachusetts, were forced to take up the question of women's rights as they fought against job exploitation. In a strike in 1836, over 800 women demonstrated against pay cuts. One journalist commented that the leaders of the strike made a "flaming Wollstonecraft speech on the rights of women and the inequities of the monied aristocracy." Two years later in another strike, the women marched, singing:

"Oh! Isn't it a pity that such a pretty girl as I
Should be sent to the factory to pine away and die.
Oh! I cannot be a slave.
Oh! I will not be a slave,
For I'm so fond of liberty
That I cannot be a slave."

In the 1840's, these textile workers formed the Lowell Female Reform Association which pledged to continue the fight for women's and workers' rights. The women produced their own newspaper called the **Factory Girl** which was later named the **Voice of Industry.** Sarah Bagley, the leader

of the Female Reform Association, represented the women at the International Workingmen's Association, the first revolutionary International in which Karl Marx played a leading role. At one of the meetings she presented the Association with the women's banner which had as its motto, "The Union for Power—Power to Bless Humanity."

The paper, **Voice of Industry,** discussed all aspects of women's life and work. The women themselves were under no illusions about their position in society. For example, one woman wrote:

"What glorious privileges we injoy in this boasted Republican land, don't we. Here I am, a healthy New England girl, quite well behaved, bestowing just half of all my hours including Sundays upon a company for less than two cents an hour."

The journal was smuggled out to other workers in New England, Delaware, New York, and Pennsylvania. Throughout the short history of the Lowell Female Reform Association, it fought for the ten-hour day, higher wages and better working conditions.(3) In fighting around these demands, which are for the whole working class, the Association was in fact waging a struggle around women's issues. Part of the oppression of women is that they were (and still are) subject to the worst jobs, worst conditions and worst pay because they are women.

Working women continued the fight wherever they worked. In Lynn, Massachusetts, a tremendous labor dispute took place in 1859 involving 20,000 women and men shoemakers. The local newspapers were very concerned at the militancy of the women involved. They commented that the women were more militant on the picket lines and tended to treat scabs harsher than men did. The newspapers also brought out the fact that the shoemaker's strike was living proof of the dangerous aspects of women's rights. These women were striking for equal pay for equal work. "What next? roared one paper, "Socialism!"

Throughout this strike, the women compared themselves to the women of the 1776 revolution. A reporter from the radical paper the **New York Herald** commented, "They assail the bosses in a style which reminds one of the amiable fe-

males who participated in the first French revolution."

On March 8, 1859, the women shoemakers held their own demonstration, and ten days later they marched with their brother workers in what was called the greatest labor demonstrations of that time.

Because of the militancy of the women and because they had the support of their fellow workers as well as sections of the working class community, the women won most of their demands. Yet because of the instability of the female labor force at the time, it was impossible to sustain those kinds of working women's organizations.

In America, working class women did not begin the process of linking the fight for women's liberation with the fight for socialism until the twentieth century. However, their sisters in Europe had begun that process.

EUROPE

In the European women's movement in England and France, working class women were part of other radical and working class movements which quite often took up the call for women's liberation.

One of the major radical or revolutionary feminists to do so was Flora Tristan. Tristan was a feminist and a socialist who linked the oppression of women with capitalism, and called for an international working class movement that could smash capitalism and women's oppression. In 1843, she edited a paper called the **Workers Union**, devoted to the cause of working women, where she discussed the problems that women faced. She tirelessly lectured throughout Europe where she found some who would agree with her. However,

a few months before she died, she complained that,"I have nearly the whole world against me. Men, because I demand the emancipation of women, the owners, because I demand the emancipation of wage earners." Tristan died in 1848, leaving behind an unpublished book called the **Emancipation of Women or the Testament of a Pariah.** Thousands of workers attended her funeral and left singing "Flora Tristan needs a grave." She remained an important part in the French working class tradition.(4)

Eleanor Marx was another important revolutionary feminist and socialist of the late nineteenth century. She was the daughter of Karl Marx, and this fact alone obscured her remarkable career as a feminist, Marxist thinker and agitator. In the 1880s she came to the United States to speak on behalf of the Haymarket martyrs—seven men falsely accused and later hanged for a bombing conspiracy. Upon her return to England, she involved herself in the massive working class upsurge of the New Unionism. During the great dock strike of 1889, she was an officer of the strike committee. She was so popular as the union delegate from an area called Silvertown that she was referred to as "our mother."

Marx was also involved in the women's movement. She worked with pioneer feminist Elizabeth Garret-Anderson to form an all women's hospital. She campaigned for the election of a Mrs. Westlake to the London school board. Marx had some misgivings about working with upperclass women. "It is, of course, chiefly an advantage for bourgeois (women) but it is always something, and it is time that women, too, may be able to work and to have other occupations than dress."

However, most of Marx's feminist activity was with working class women, in particular with the women of the East End of London. Marx's experiences with the dockers' wives only strengthened her feminist conviction. She co-authored a pamphlet entitled "The Woman Question" which took up questions such as the class nature of women's oppression as well as the need for the self organization of women fighting for their liberation:

"The truth not fully recognized even by those anxious to do good to women is that she, like the labor classes, is in an

oppressed condition; that her position, like theirs, is one of merciless degradation. Women are the creatures of an unorganized tyranny of idleness. Even where this much has been grasped, we must never be weary of insisting...that for women, as for the laboring classes, no solution of the difficulties and problems that present themselves is really possible in the present condition of society. All that is done, heralded with no matter flourish of trumpets is pallative, not remedial. Both the oppressed classes, women and the immediate producers, must understand that their emancipation will come from themselves.''

This little known pamphlet of Marx' outlines the basic Marxist approach to the woman question. Women's oppression is tied with the oppression of the working class under capitalism. All women suffer under capitalism, but only working class women can lead the fight for women's liberation. She also pointed out in the pamphlet that the various reforms sought after by the bourgeois feminists could never end women's oppression; only a working class movement that ended class society and capitalism could do that.

Finally, Eleanor Marx added a new dimension to earlier Marxist theory on women's position in society: that destroying capitalism would not automatically free women, the emancipation of women would come through their self organization and activity.

Marx' theories on women were in part based on the experience of 1871 during the Paris Commune. The Commune of 1871 was the first attempt by the working class to seize power in this case in Paris, and rule the city democratically. The experience of the working class in Paris was important for the women's liberation struggle.

Before the working class actually took power in March 1871, there had been considerable working class feminist activity. France had been at war with Germany, and like all wars declared by the capitalist class, the working class paid the price with starvation, misery and death. Women had played a considerable role in the militancy prior to March 1871. Women such as Andre Leo, Elizabeth Dmietroff, Nathalie Lemel and Louise Michel had formed women's organizations that fought for women's rights in

Eleanor Marx

the context of the working class' fight for power.

On March 18, 1871, it was the women who met the invading French troops and persuaded them not to fire on the Paris working class, but to join them. It was the women who, through their militancy and organization, demanded an end to profiteering on foods and other necessities of life.

However, inspite of the heroic militancy of women, the working class men who seized power did not give women political rights. Women could not vote nor could they serve on any of the political committees of the Commune. This example showed that working class men would not automatically give women equal rights. The fight for women's liberation would always have to be waged by the women's movement. Women's liberation can only be acheived in a new society, which requires a common fight with working class men. Even then, working class women will require their own **independent** movement and struggles to assure victory for their liberation.

While the women were unjustifiably excluded from the political machinery of the Commune, they did, in fact, win some basic economic and social rights, in particular with regard to the family. Illegitimacy, or the "sin" of having a child born out of wedlock, was abolished, and common law wives of soldiers could receive pensions on the same basis as legal wives.

The working women of the Commune knew that even though their brothers on the barricades did not fight for equal political rights, their salvation lay with the preservation of the Commune.

The **Women's Union,** newspaper for a revolutionary women's organization proclaimed:

"...the women of Paris will prove to France and to the world that they, too, at the moment of supreme danger—at the barricades and at the ramparts of Paris, if the reactionary powers should force her gates—they too know how, like their brothers, to give their blood and their life for the defense and triumph of the Commune, that is, the people."

The Paris Commune lasted only three months. The ruling government of France had not been overthrown and in May, French troops moved in and began the bloody slaughter.

Over 20,000 workers were murdered. Communard women were not spared, but faced even more brutal deaths at the hands of the ruling class. Women were raped before they were killed, or raped in their death throes. Those women not killed, such as Louise Michel, were sentenced to deportation to the arid islands in the South Pacific.

The Paris Commune was brutally destroyed, but the lessons of the Commune were learned by later generations of revolutionary feminists. The Commune pointed out that while all women shared oppression, not all women wanted to destroy the capitalist system that perpetuated it. During the carnage of the counterrevolution, upperclass women who followed their class interests first, welcomed and participated in the firing squads against working class women.

The Commune showed the necessity of the independent organization of working women for the victory of women's liberation. The government of the Commune had denied women many rights. However, it was only because of the various women's organizations that fought for women and the working class as a whole that women won the rights that they did.

Finally, the Commune shows clearly the relationship of women's liberation to the fight for socialism. The working women of the Commune knew that their misery as workers and as women could never end until capitalist society was smashed. Exploitative working and social relationships could only end when the exploitative social system was replaced by one based upon the collective rule of the working class. The women of Paris fought for their emancipation through their own self organization and activity. However, they were always part of the working class movement, and enriched and added to it.

The Paris Commune marks the first time that working class women led the fight for a revolutionary solution to the special problems they faced. While many were deported, thousands slaughtered and countless others forced into submission in a few years, other working women in France and throughout the capitalist world took up the banner of the Communard sisters.

MIDDLE CLASS WOMEN

Not all women, of course, believed in a revolutionary solution to the problems of women's oppression. The women's movement was sharply divided between those women who fought for a worker's revolution and those women who wanted no part of any massive social upheaval. It was those upper and middle class women who were for the most part 'professional' women, who were, in a sense, reactionary as feminists. These middle class women fought for reforms that would only benefit a few priviledged women. They wanted these reforms so that they could be integrated into the capitalist system. Such women wanted to be businesswomen, lawyers, doctors, bankers; in short, they wanted the opportunities their husbands enjoyed.

These middle class women also opposed the organization and activities of working class women. This is not very surprising. In the period from 1890 to 1920, capitalism faced a number of crises. The working class internationally was on the offensive, and issuing a challenge to the ruling class. Middle class women were aware of this upheaval and feared it. After all, a working class revolution would end their privileged status as well.

What the women of the middle classes, particularly the middle class suffrage movement, wanted was political rights enjoyed by the men of their class. They wanted these rights so that they too could better preserve class rule for themselves and the men of their class.

The American suffrage movement was conservative in its approach to women's liberation because of its reliance upon the two capitalist political parties. The National American Women's Suffrage Association (NAWSA) always believed

that suffrage would be won only by winning the support of one of the two parties. By placing their faith in the Democratic and Republican parties, these suffragists could never be able to deal with the root causes of women's opppression.

Neither party, then, as now, was interested in fundamentally changing women's position in society. At that time, they were willing to make a few bland pronouncements about women, but they were not going to take any decisive action. Both parties were limited in what they could offer by their commitment to capitalism. Any effort to really end the oppression of women would require fundamental changes in the organization of class society—indeed they would require ending class society itself. by only working through the Democratic Party, the suffragists could not wage an independent campaign of their own. This strategy prevented even winning the minimal gain of women's suffrage until 1920.

NAWSA's covert support for the Democratic Party also was responsible for the blatant racism of the suffrage movement. In fact, it was primarily the race question that prevented any women's suffrage legislation until 1919. Neither the Republican nor the Democratic Party wanted to introduce a Federal amendment granting women suffrage. The reason, especially for the Democratic Party, was that black men in the South, through the use of Jim Crow laws, couldn't vote. If there was a Federal amendment granting women the right to vote, it would in theory, allow black women in the south to vote. And that, argued the racists, would open up the race question in the South. President Wilson stated bluntly to the president of NAWSA, Carrie Chapman Catt, that "it was the race question that kept women from voting."

NAWSA did not believe that the South's racist policies should ever be challenged. They were afraid of alienating middle class Southern women as well as politicians—North and South. It was mainly that reason that made NAWSA so reactionary on the race question.

The hostility of the suffragists towards black and working class women was clear. Carrie Chapman Catt declared:

"This government is faced with great danger...That danger lies in the votes possessed by males in the slums of the cities and the ignorant foreign vote..."

Or Ida Husted Harper, leading NAWSA member who echoed Catt's reactionary sentiments:

"Consider what (the electorate) has received during the past thirty-five years from the majority of Negroes, Indians and immigrants who have been enfranchised during that time and then judge whether women as a body could not offset these last acquisitions. Those who fear the foreign vote and the colored vote should remember that there are more native born women in the United States than foreign born men and women, more white women than colored men and women."

While this speech was openly racist and hostile to workers, it also reflected Harper's class bias. The ruling class of this country was (and still is for the most part) made up of rich white men. They were the ones who made a mess of the country, not black and white workers!

Bele Kearney, a southern suffragist, gave a speech in 1903 which sounded more like a rallying cry for the Ku Klux Klan:

"The South is slow to grasp the great fact that the enfranchisement of women would settle the race question in politics. The civilization in the North is threatened by the influx of foreigners with their imported customs; by the greed of the monopolistic wealth and unrest among the working classes; by the strength of the liquor traffic and the encroachments on religious beliefs. Someday the North will be compelled to look to the South for redemption from those evils on account of the purity of its Anglo-Saxon blood, the simplicity of its social and economic structure, the great advance in prohibitory laws and the maintenance of the sanctity of its faith. Just as surely as the North will be forced to turn to the South for the nation's salvation, just so surely will the South be compelled to look to its Anglo-Saxon women as the medium through which to maintain the supremacy of the white race over the African."

Those are the sentiments of the right wing of the middle class suffrage movement—hostility to the working class, black and other minority men and women, combined with the belief that white middle class women were best suited to solve the problems of class and racial conflict. They only represented the right wing. Nevertheless, they were com-

patible with that movement and tolerated by it in much the same way that the Democratic Party and Ted Kennedy can tolerate, accord honor to and work with George Wallace.

These middle class women were hostile not only to working class men; they consistently demonstrated that they were uninterested in or opposed to the movement of working women fighting for liberation. NAWSA was solely interested in the vote, and argued that by espousing other causes, in particular the struggles of working class women, influential (read: rich) women would be alienated from the suffrage ranks. So for example, in order to appease the racists, both North and South, black women were not to march in suffrage parades. At the annual NAWSA conventions, black women were kept in segregated areas. This was done in spite of the fact that black militant intellectuals such as W.E.B. Dubois had in the past addressed NAWSA, telling them that the plight of blacks and the plight of women were interwoven.

NAWSA refused to have anything to do with women involved in the labor movement. In 1911 a terrible fire broke out at the Triangle Shirtwaist factory. 143 young women were either burned to death or died as they threw themselves out of the flaming building. It had turned out that the Triangle factory was a notoriously dangerous factory. Women were locked into rooms. There were no windows and no fire escapes. The masses of garment workers argued that these 143 women were murdered by their bosses. The women planned a massive demonstration to protest these dangerous working conditions. NAWSA refused to support and participate in this action. One member explained that they didn't want to get mixed up with the causes of labor.

There were other cases as well. For example, Margaret Sanger was the head of the women's section of the American Socialist Party and a pioneer in the fight for birth control reforms. In 1913 and 1914 she faced jail terms for her advocacy of contraception. The organized suffrage movement did nothing to help her. Only the socialist movement rallied support for her. Rose Pastor Stoke, Kate Richards O'Hare and Eugene Debs, to name a few, vowed to raise a workers' army to march to the jail if Sanger was ever incarcerated.

There are other cases involving suffragists scabbing on

workers' strikes, their racist attitudes toward black women, indifference to the plight of the masses of working class women. All this proves that women, like men, follow their class interests. This narrow approach, which claimed only to be interested in the problems of women, and not wanting to take up other social causes, was racist, anti-working class and even anti-women. That is, when the struggle for women's emancipation conflicted with their class interests, they rapidly scuttled the former.

This was true in other countries as well. In England, there was a massive suffrage movement involving hundreds of thousands of upper and middle class women. However, they demanded the votes only for a minority of women! In England before the first world war, only men who owned a certain amount of property and who had worked in the same place for a certain period of time could vote. It was estimated that over 70% of the adult population was disenfranchised. Most unskilled male workers couldn't vote in England during that time, and all women were denied the ballot.

The middle class suffrage movement was organized and led by Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughter Christobel. These two women were able to mobilize hundreds and thousands of women in a fierce battle for the vote. Their organization, the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), staged massive demonstrations (one was estimated at 750,000, the largest in modern English history); they also broke windows, blew up buildings, destroyed other forms of property and mercilessly heckled all politicians. One woman, Emily Davidson, even committed suicide for the vote. In turn, the government response was to torture and jail the militants.

In spite of the militancy of the WSPU, these women did not want to do anything to upset the class forces in England. Like their sisters in America, they wanted the vote because they demanded to be allowed to help run the capitalist state. Also, these upper and middle class women were furious that they were denied political rights that working men enjoyed. The WSPU was so hostile to working women that they expelled the huge working class section of the WSPU, the East London Federation of the Suffragettes, led by another

Pankhurst daughter, Sylvia. Christobel argued that the East London Federation was a "working class group...too democratic."

In Germany as well there were sharp divisions between the working class and socialist women's movement and the middle class women. Once again the middle class women wanted political rights only for themselves. They too introduced suffrage legislation that would grant the vote to women of property. Clara Zetkin, leader of the working class socialist women's movement, acidly pointed out that those supporters of women's rights were "interested in the rights of ladies, not of the rights of women." When a leading member of the German Social Democratic Party and a well known advocate of women's liberation, August Bebel, ran for Parliament, the bourgeois women quickly forgot their so-called feminist convictions. So opposed were they to the working class that they would support a capitalist candidate hostile to women's rights over an ardent socialist champion of women's liberation.

Russia was no exception. The middle class feminists also did not want to give the ballot to the working woman. They also opposed the idea of child care centers, protective labor laws for pregnant women, and maternity leaves! No wonder. These leisured women would never have to endure the hardships of factory life. If they didn't need child care centers and maternity leaves, why should the working class women have them?

At one All Russian Feminist Congress held in 1905, Alexandra Kollontai, leader of the working women's movement and later Bolshevik Party member, read out the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party's demands for women workers. They included maternity care and other protective laws for working women. The middle class feminists responded by shouting "Throw her out!" "Shut her up!"

These feminists had no real commitment to women's liberation. What they wanted were greater political rights for themselves, and at the expense of working class women. Their solution was not for women's liberation, but for equal rights and more privileges for ladies.

REVOLUTIONARY WOMEN

While the middle class feminists were organizing the fight to "improve" and "reform" capitalism, millions of working class women, through their own organizations, waged the fight for women's liberation.

In the United States, the working women's movement was never as massive as it was in Europe. Nonetheless, hundreds and thousands of working women fought to build trade unions which fought for their rights as workers. It was the "Uprising of the 40,000"—the General Strike in the clothing trades in 1913—led by young women garment workers, that paved the way for one of the first industrial unions in this country. Margaret Sanger was able to mobilize thousands of working women in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn in support of her fight for birth control. Rose Pastor Stokes, Kate Richards O'Hare, Kate Sadler Flynn, all members of the left wing of the Socialist Party, organized working class women to fight within the labor movement for their rights as women and as workers.

Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, the "Rebel Girl" of Joe Hill's song, was one of the most famous. Her first public speech at the age of 16 was on "A Woman's Place." She achieved national prominence as a member of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). In 1912, she was an organizer of the Lawrence, Massachusetts mill strike in which thousands of women and children fought desperately to improve their lives.

Not all women involved in the working class movement saw themselves as feminists. But their actions as fighters for working women pointed the way to women's liberation. Mother Jones, a labor organizer, is one example.

She knew well the difference between the working class and the rich women, and she once said, "God Almighty made the Women and the Rockefeller gang of thieves made the Ladies." She did not think the fight for woman suffrage was very important."You don't need the vote to raise hell like me," she once stated at a suffrage meeting. And when asked what women should do, she responded, "Whatever you do, don't be ladylike!" Even though Mother Jones did not consciously see herself as a feminist, her lifelong fight to organize working men and women, her struggle for the children of the working class, made her a fighter for women's liberation. This was especially so since the battle she waged necessitated a fight against the misery women faced.

The outstanding revolutionary feminist in America was Emma Goldman. Goldman was one of the first to talk about the conservatism of the organized suffrage movement. She helped in the organization drives of garment and other working women. She was an advocate of birth control, and went to jail for distributing contraceptive literature. She spoke out in behalf of full legal and social rights for homosexuals. In so many ways, she was a giant in the American women's movement.

However, she never organized or participated in any women's groups. Without an organization that could involve masses of women in the fight for women's liberation, Goldman's ideas were never fought for. They remained just ideas. Some of Emma Goldman's theories of feminism were never translated into organized action because of her anarchist point of view.

In England there was an important working class women's movement. The East London Federation of the Suffragettes was the major organization. The ELFS had been organized by Sylvia Pankhurst who had earlier rejected the reactionary ideas of her mother and sister. Pankhurst believed that only working women could win women's liberation for all women. She believed that women's freedom would only come through the organization and struggles of working women themselves. She went into the working class districts on the East End to build that working class movement:

"I regarded the rousing of the East End of the utmost im-

portance.My aim was not merely to make some members and establish some branches but the larger task of bringing the district as a whole into a mass movement from which only a minority could stand aside...The creation of a women's movement in that abyss of poverty would be a call and a rallying cry to the rise of similar movements in all parts of the country...I was anxious too, to fortify the position of the working women when the vote should actually be given: the existence of a strong self-reliant movement amongst working women would be the greatest aid in safeguarding their rights on the day of settlement. Moreover, I was looking to the future: I wanted to rouse these women of the submerged tenth to be fighters on their own account, despising platitudes and catch cries, revolting against the hideous condition about them and demanding for themselves and their families a full share of the benefits of civilization and progress.''(7)

Over 2,000 women participated in the ELFS and campaigned for the unionization of working women, for free child care centers, for communal laundries, restaurants, free health clinics and other measures designed to emancipate women from the tyranny of the capitalist factory and housework. The ELFS did not see its fight as separate from the fight of the working class as a whole. It was the first organization on the left to support the Dublin General Strike of 1913. It was their participation in strike activity that convinced other English trade unions and socialist organizations to aid their sister and brother workers in Dublin.

The ELFS waged a militant fight for women's liberation. Because of their militancy, the government responded with savage repression. In order to protect themselves and their communities, the women formed a People's Army of Self Defense. This army won the respect of the people in the East End. These ordinary workers didn't laugh as the women drilled in the streets. Working class men knew that self-defense was just as important for women as it was for men.

The People's Army had several functions. One, it was designed to protect Pankhurst and others from being arrested. It was also to be used to prevent landlords from evicting tenants. The Federation had begun a rent strike to protest

Sylvia Pankhurst

against high costs of rent and rotten housing conditions. If landlords attempted to arrest or evict supporters of the rent strike, the army would protect the tenants.

The third reason for the existence of the army was to train the working class for the eventual takeover of power. Pankhurst and the Federation felt that the People's Army would one day march on to Parliament and take it over.

The army was successful in its first two tasks. It was able to protect suffrage militants from being arrested, and tenants from being evicted. It was not able to accomplish its third task. Nevertheless, the Army itself showed that these working class women understood that in order for workers to win emancipation, they would have to take control over all aspects of the government.

The East London Federation demonstrated the importance of organization in the working woman's fight for the liberation of all women. It was mainly the massive militant demonstrations by working class women that finally wrung woman's suffrage from the government. The government feared the mass militancy of working women far more than the individual terrorism of upper class suffragettes. The Federation, by fighting for more than just the vote—for workers' control and the socialization of housework—pointed the way to the real meaning of women's liberation.

It is not surprising then that as the pace of struggles increased, more and more women involved in the agitation moved toward a socialist perspective. The women began to realize that their fight for women's liberation was inextricably tied up with the oppression and exploitation of the working class under capitalism.

This was made clear during the first world war. All suffrage organizations except the ELFS supported the imperialist carnage. The working women of the East End knew that this war was fought for the benefit of a few and at the expense of themselves and their families. The Federation took a leadership role in organizing the anti-war activities.

After the war, the Federation named itself the Workers' Socialist Federation. It was the first organization to enthusiastically welcome and support the Russian Revolution.

Pankhurst played an instrumental part in the formation of a revolutionary communist party.

After the war ended, Pankhurst emerged as one of the leading revolutionary figures in England. For two years she was Lenin's chief English correspondent. She was invited to Moscow to argue her political convictions to the Communist International.

When the revolutionary movement in England ebbed, Pankhurst retreated from her working class activities. Nonetheless, her role in building the East London Federation of the Suffragettes points out the importance of the working women's movement, of the necessity for the independent organization of women, and the relationship between women's emancipation and the fight for socialism.

In many cases, the fighters for women's liberation were directly part of the working class socialist movement. The largest socialist organization as well as working women's movement was in Germany. Since the 1848 revolution, the working class movement there had always been in the leadership of the fight for women's equality. In 1848 during the German revolution, the first workers' clubs were formed. At their first congress, they demanded, among other things, equality for women.

However, it was after the 1880's that a massive socialist working women's movement was built in Germany. One of the reasons that working women looked to the Social Democratic Party (SDP) was because it was the only political organization which encouraged women's participation. In Germany, as in Ireland, women were forbidden by laws to be involved in political organization. The SPD broke those laws and began organizing women. Some of the giants of the socialist movement of that time were women, primarily, Rosa Luxemburg and Clara Zetkin.

The German Socialist movement proved too that men can fight for women's liberation. August Bebel, the leader of the SPD, spoke extensively on the subject and campaigned for women's rights. His book, **Women Under Socialism** was required reading for all party members.

Finally, the SDP proved through its actions in the political field, by campaigning for women's rights and within the

trade union movement, that revolutionary socialists could and must be fighters for women's liberation.

In 1893, Clara Zetkin, the leader of the German working women's movement organized the first socialist women's organization. While Zetkin fully believed that the fight for women's liberation would come only through the victory of the working class, she knew that women must form their own organizations to decide their own course of action. By 1914 there were over two million women members. In 1896 the first socialist women's conference was called; because of its tremendous success they were held every year. Zetkin also organized international women's conferences where women throughout Europe and America would come to discuss strategy for women's liberation. She was also the editor of a working women's socialist newspaper called **Gleicheit** (Equality) which had a circulation of millions.

Zetkin was the international leader of the working women's movement. In 1911 she introduced a resolution at the International Socialist Congress to make March 8th International Woman's Day. She had been inspired by the demonstration of American garment workers who in 1909 proclaimed the 8th of March Women Workers' Day. The women marched through the streets of New York carrying banners demanding the vote, child care and an end to sweatshop working conditions. After the Second International approved March 8th as Working Women's Day, it was celebrated by the working class throughout the world.

Over and over again it was demonstrated in practice that the working class struggle was consistent with the struggle for women's emancipation and required no compromise. Even more: the socialist struggle required pressing the struggle for the liberation of women to the fullest extent in order to realize socialism. The struggle against the oppression of women requires the destruction of capitalism and all class society to be fully successful.

THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

The Russian Revolution changed world history. It was the culmination, the highest level acheived in the centuries-old struggle of the working class. All around the world, workers rejoiced at the successful seizure of power by the Russian workers and all around the world they marvelled at the example set by the new workers' state.

The Russian Revolution put to a test the aims of the socialist movement concerning the emancipation of women. Would socialism mean real gains for women? Would ending capitalism truly lay the basis for ending women's oppression?

The answer provided by the revolutionary regime was a resounding 'yes'. Every effort was made, along every line, to make women free and equal. When men revolutionaries resisted they were countered by women's organizations which themselves were encouraged by the revolutionaries. Great leaps in the position of women continued to be made until the Stalinist counter-revolution set in and destroyed the revolution itself.

The leader of the Russian women workers' movement was Allexandra Kollontai. She was born into a wealthy military family but became involved in radical politics during the upheavals of the 1890s. In 1896 she joined the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party. She became deeply involved in the massive strikes of women textile workers in the 1890s, and this experience forged her ideas regarding feminism. She wrote an account of the strikes in her **History of the Russian Women Workers Movement.**

In many ways, the Russian women's movement was unlike the movements of the West. In the first place, industrialism

and the creation of a middle class came late to Russia. The newly created capitalist class was never very large in numbers or power and therefore the Russian bourgeois feminist organizations were never as strong as their counterparts in the West.

Also, because industrialization came late to Russia, the factories that were built were the most advanced in the world. In these modern factories were huge concentrations of working women. In some of the textile and munitions plants up to 10,000 women would be employed. Because of the concentration of working women, working women's organizations arose out of the labor struggles. These groups represented the most advanced thinking about women's equality.

There was one other difference. In Russia, the middle class sent their daughters to universities on an equal basis with their sons. This meant that women students played an important role in the student unrest. Throughout the history of Russia since the 1860s, women were accepted as leaders and the revolutionary student groups had women's liberation as one of their goals.

As a result of the large concentrations of women workers and their organizations as well as the participation of radical women students in the revolutionary movements, the foundation was laid for the revolutionary organizations to take up women's liberation as a crucial political question.

After the revolution of 1905, Kollontai formed the first political working women's club. These clubs later became the backbone of the revolutionary women's organization called Xhenodetl. In 1907, she was forced to flee Russia, but she continued her political work. In 1911, she organized Parisian housewives and textile workers to celebrate International Women's Day.

Kollontai believed strongly in the need for independent organization of women in fighting for their own emancipation. In her analysis of the German working women's movement, **Women Workers Struggle for Their Rights**, she wrote:

"A woman worker is not only a member of the working class but at the same time she is a representative of one half of the human race. As opposed to the feminists, the socialists demanding equal rights for women in state and society do not shut their eyes to the fact that women's responsibilities toward the collective society will always be somewhat different than men's. The woman is not only an independent worker and citizen—at the same

time she is a **mother**, a bearer of the future. This gives rise to a whole series of special demands in areas such as women's labor protection, security for maternity and childhood, help with the problems of the child's upbringing, and so on.''

While Kollontai believed in women organizing independently to fight for freedom, she did not believe that this mean women's organizations were counterposed to the working class fight for socialism. She demanded that the revolutionary party take up in its prorgam and work, fights that would lead to women's emancipation.

Because of the strength of the working women's movement, and through Kollontai's efforts, the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party took a firm stand on women's liberation. Kollontai admitted that there was always a fight within the Party:

''I realized for the first time how little our Party concerned itself with the fate of the women of the working class and how meager was its interest in women's liberation . . . but my Marxist outlook pointed out to me with illuminating clarity that women's liberation could only take place as the result of the victory of a new social order and economic system . . .''

And again:

''My party comrades (in this case she was referring to the Menshevik faction) accused me and those women-comrades who shared my views of being 'feminists' and placing too much emphasis on matters of concern to women only . . .''

However, she was successful. The Russian Social Democratic Labor Party called for equal political rights for women and also for special provisions for women workers: pregnant women should not work in factories that are health hazards; they should receive four weeks prenatal and six weeks postnatal leave; all enterprises employing women should have child care facilities; nursing mothers should be allowed to leave their work at half hour intervals of no longer than three hours; factory inspectors should be replaced by women in industries with a female labor force.

The Russian Revolution of 1917 began on International Women's Day. Women demonstrated in the streets for lower bread prices, an end to the war, and greater pensions for the wives of soldiers and sailors. They appealed to their working class brothers, and soon all of Petrograd was aroused. Within a few days,

Alexandra Kollontai

the Tsar had abdicated.

It wasn't until November 1917 that the Russian Revolution led by the Bolshevik Party was complete. The workers of Russia took state power. This workers' revolution accomplished more for women's liberation than any other event then or now in human history. The working class had ended capitalist property relations, smashed the capitalist state, and began the task of creating a new socialist society.

For the millions of working class women, the revolution meant the end to exploited labor. Women, for the first time in their lives, had control over their work situations. The Bolshevik Party enforced statutes giving equal pay and equal work opportunities and encouraged women to find employment. Protective laws which enabled pregnant and nursing mothers to work in more comfort and safety were enacted. Women could take maternity leaves without fear of losing their jobs.

In order for the revolution to lay the basis for women's emancipation, two fundamental changes had to be made in society. Both had been outlined in Fredrick Engels' major theoretical work on women, **Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State.** Engels argued that the preconditions for women's emancipation would come about only through women entering the work force on a mass scale. In the past, women had been excluded from the work force; this became one of the reasons for their subordinate position in society. The Bolsheviks not only enacted measures that allowed women to play a full role in the economic development, but also measures to involve working and peasant women in the myriad of political, cultural and social organizations that sprang up as a result of the revolution. It was through the women's economic and political involvement that their consciousness of themselves as revolutionary women was forged.

Engels and other Marxist feminists argued that in order for women to be free, not only would they have to enter the labor force on a mass scale, but also that women's subordinate position within the capitalist family would have to be destroyed. The tedium and drudgery of housework would have to be socialized. Society as a whole, would take responsibility for the functions of the family—cooking, cleaning, laundering, etc. In this way, the economic functions of the family and women's role as the maintainer of the family would no longer exist. The family then, could be-

come a personal arrangement based upon genuine love and respect.

In the area of legislation, laws were enacted that would shatter the old, oppressive family structure. Forced marriages were outlawed and women were allowed to choose their partners regardless of religion or nationality.

No distinctions were made between "illegitimate" and "legitimate" children. Couples could continue to live together without fear of economic and social sanctions. The divorce law was liberalized and divorce was made cheaper. No stigma was attached to a divorced woman. A married woman could keep her own name, property and home. Alimony was granted after a divorce, but this was seen only as a transitional measure until the woman could find jobs and child care.

Laws governing sexual behavior were repealed. For example, homosexuality was no longer a crime.

Measures were instituted to give women greater rights regarding contraception. Abortions were made free and legal, and the Bolsheviks pledged themselves to improve research on modern, effective means of contraception.

Not only were laws changed, but more importantly, institutions were set up that could guarantee women full social, political and economic independence. Communal restaurants which freed women from the kitchen were established. In Leningrad in 1919 and 1920, for example, over 90% of the city was fed communally; in Moscow it was 60%. The communal restaurants were also a necessity due to the hardships caused by the Civil War. Kollontai pointed out:

"Were the standard of communal feeding higher, it is doubtful we should find a woman who would volunteer to bend over a cooking range. In a workers' state where a woman is recognized as an independent unit and citizen, it is doubtful whether you would find many volunteers for stooping over a stove to win a husband's approval. Let men learn to love women not for being good at kneading dough, but for their personal qualities, their human ego. Separation of kitchen from marriage is a reform no less important than the separation of church and state, at any rate, in the history of women."(9)

The new workers' state set up communal housing supplied with hot and cold running water, light and heat. Central laun-

dries and cleaners were established along with nurseries. "For the working woman, the communal house is the greatest blessing and salvation," exulted Kollontai.

The Soviets also established new principles regarding children and young people. All children had full legal rights. Raising and caring for children was no longer the sole responsibility of the working woman. The socialist government set up child care centers and nurseries. There was free public education through the university level. Women students were given equal education opportunities in all fields.

The tremendous accomplishments were largely due to the efforts of the new women's organization, the Xhenodetl. The Xhenodetl had been set up as the working and peasant women's department of the Communist Party. There had been some opposition to this at first because some Bolsheviks felt an organization of women was too "feministic." However, the Xhenodetl played a tremendous role in educating and mobilizing women for the revolution. Under Kollontai's leadership, the Xhenodetl intervened in all aspects of soviet life to ensure that measures for women's liberation were enacted. In fact, in some instances, if it hadn't been for the self organization of women, there would have been setbacks.

For example, in 1919, soldiers were returning from the front, and when they returned, quite naturally they wanted jobs. The Bolshevik Party at first ruled that the women in the factories should allow the men to get their jobs. The Xhenodetl disagreed and argued within the Bolshevik Party. The result was that all employment and unemployment measures were issued on the basis of need and ability, not sex.(10) This is but one example of the importance of the independent organization of women. Through organization and activity, they were able to make certain that discriminatory policies were not established.

In these ways, and in others, the Russian people began the process of freeing women from economic exploitation and alienation of work and home. For the first time in human history, a society was established which promised full freedom for everyone.

However, there were still fantastic problems facing the Russians. In spite of all the new policies, things were far from perfect. Peasant women, by far the vast majority of the female population, still led lives of grinding poverty, ignorance and superstí-

tion. The tremendous upheaval in Russia led to the shattering of old family ties. In particular, it was the dissolution of the old family combined with the tremendous economic dislocations which contributed to the social chaos which existed. As Trotsky explained in **Problems of Every Day Life:**

"Some viewed it (the chaos) with great misgivings, others with reserve, and others seemed perplexed. It was, anyhow, clear to all that some big process was going on very chaotic, assuming alternatively morbid or revolting, ridiculous or tragic, forms which had not yet had time to disclose its hidden possibilities of inaugurating a new and higher order of family life."

Because of the severe economic problems, communal living was often seen as some form of punishment. Again, Trotsky commented:

"Many homes which had been allotted to families living in communes got into filthy conditions and became uninhabitable. People living in them did not consider communistic housing as a beginning of a new life. They looked upon their dwellings as upon a barracks provided by the state."

There were other problems as well. Many of the men, including leaders of the Bolshevik Party were uncertain about the new emancipation of women. They had not been able to completely break away from the old ideas about women's inferiority. One woman described how her husband had put an end to her political activity:

"And in those very meetings which he forbids me to attend because he is afraid I will become a real person—what he needs is a cook and mistress wife—in those very meetings where I have to slip in secretly, he makes thunderous speeches about the role of women in the revolution, calls women to a more active role."(11)

The debate within the Communist Party about how to emancipate women, the nature of female sexuality, working women, the need for independent organizations of women, continued through the years of the revolution. During the years of the workers' state, there were endless open discussions on how to solve the myriad of social and sexual problems brought about by the revolution.

However, the Russia Revolution was lost before the liberation of women was achieved. Millions of women were brought into economic, social and political life as free, independent human

beings. But tens of millions of others, particularly among the peasantry, continued to live lives of backwardness, superstition and domestic slavery. Before the revolution could liberate these women it was destroyed.

Russian industry, upon which the new workers' state was built, was nearly totally destroyed by the imperialist invasions and civil war. The Russian working class, which had made the revolution, was relatively small to begin with and then declined to a fraction of its size due to the destruction of industry, the civil war, and the cities being overcome by famine and hunger. Most decisive was that the revolution received no help from the outside. Lenin, Trotsky and the Bolsheviks were under no illusion that socialism could be built in one isolated country, and a backward one at that. The perspective of the Bolsheviks was that their revolution was only the first step of the world revolution. World capitalism was cracking at its weakest link, Russia. For the revolution to succeed it would have to spread to the advanced industrialized countries of western Europe who would collaborate in industrializing Russia on a socialist basis.

The revolution did spread—to Germany, Austria, Italy and other parts of Europe where millions of revolutionary workers rose to occupy factories, organize workers' councils and fight civil wars against capitalism. But everywhere the revolution was defeated—betrayed by the social democratic and trade union bureaucracies who rose to the defense of capitalist "democracy" and their privileged position in it. They acted as agents of the bourgeois counter-revolution within the labor movement. The revolutionary parties which sprang up in this upheaval were yet too weak and politically undeveloped to gain victory. The price of defeat was bloody repression. Rosa Luxemburg, the greatest theoretician and revolutionary leader the German working class produced, was murdered while leading the revolutionary assault on capitalism.

In the absence of international revolution, with the working class destroyed, the vacuum was filled by reactionary elements in the state administrative apparatus and in the ruling Bolshevik Party. Stalin developed the strategy of "socialism in one country" and proposed competing and catching up with the capitalist powers of the West by using the same methods—capitalism's methods.

In the factories and workplaces, power was assumed by the managers and party functionaries. Together with the government bureaucracy, the army, the secret police, the basis of a new ruling class was forged, and the enormous task of accumulation was undertaken. Stalin promised to overtake the West in ten years. He planned industrial development which had taken hundreds of years elsewhere.

The human cost was staggering. The last vestige of trade union independence was destroyed. Wages were cut. Striking became a criminal offense, as did absenteeism and lateness. The internal pass system was introduced. The countryside was collectivized by force, with literally millions dying in the process. Massive slave labor camps were built. In the 1930s there were 13 million slaves in Russia. Of the original leaders of the revolution, ninety percent were murdered.

The result was the development of bureaucratic state capitalism, an industrial society based on the exploitation of the working class. And, just as the workers' revolution of 1917 had created the basis for the emancipation of women, so the defeat of the revolution ended the hopes for women's liberation. There followed a massive counter-revolution against women, during which every past gain was obliterated.

COUNTERREVOLUTION

The new ruling class nullified all the policies intended to free women. The key to all the reactionary moves made with regard to women was the importance of the family in underpinning this new class society, and the need of the state to hold it together. This is why the soviet family was glorified.

It became difficult and expensive for women tc obtain divorces. Social stigmas were attached to divorced women; for example,

divorcees could not be members of the Communist Party.

The new rulers needed children for the motherland—there was a falling birthrate in the 30s. Therefore, all abortions were outlawed, even though in 1936 the populace showed that they favored the free abortion policy. Mild abortion reform did not come to the Soviet Union until after 1956. Women with huge families were given Stalin medals of honor.

Homosexuality was made illegal again. In 1936 over 10,000 homosexuals were arrested and placed into prison camps. Homosexuals were branded as "bourgeois," "decadent," "fascist," and "oriental." This was also used to shore up the family, and at the same time, smash dissent.

By the late 30s, any discussion about women's social or sexual rights was forbidden. Kollontai's works were banned even though Kollontai herself, while "exiled" as ambassador to Norway, never raised a voice in protest. At one Party Congress in 1936, it was declared that 60 to 70% of all women were incapable of experiencing any sexual pleasure and therefore the subject need not be discussed!

Working women lost their rights as a result of the counter-revolution. Pregnant and nursing women, who previously had been protected from certain jobs and allowed to care for their children on the job lost those rights. Stalin removed all protective legislation, and in the 1930s and 40s there were numerous cases of women eight and nine months pregnant working in the mines.

In order to wipe away all past history of women's struggle, International Women's Day was no longer celebrated as a working women's holiday. Instead, it was used to glorify the mother in the home. Today, International Women's Day in Russia is celebrated the way Mother's Day is in the United States.

Today, women in Russia have not gained back the rights they lost under Stalin's tyranny. In spite of the claim that Russian women have a higher status—larger numbers of women in the work force, more women doctors and astronauts—the fundamental fact remains that Russian women are still powerless. They are still solely responsible for the preservation of the family; they have no control over their work place and the government. In short, the position of women in Russia is in many ways similar to women in America.

The feminist counter-revolution also took place in Germany as

the mass women's movement fell to facism. Hitler and the fascists believed that women's emancipation was the product of degenerate Bolshevism and Judaism. That is why Hitler destroyed the mass women's organizations in Germany which compromised 2 million women before he went after the trade unions and communist and socialist organizations.(12) In return, the third Reich promised women the KKK—a life of **Kinder** (children), **Kirche** (church) and **Kuche** (kitchen). In other words, women in the third Reich were to be kept barefoot and pregnant.

Hitler resorted to these measures not because of some abstract hatred of women's liberation, but because any independent organization of oppressed people fighting for freedom was a direct threat to fascism, and his own class aims. There were other material reasons for wanting women out of the labor force, namely, to ease the problems of unemployment. However, women did work during Hitler's Reich. They were removed from the professional and higher paying jobs—positions they had won as a direct result of the earlier feminist movement—into the lowest paying and most degrading work. Hitler wanted women not just barefoot and pregnant, but in the factories working for slave wages.

The revolutionary feminist movement was thus crushed by the twin forces of Stalinism and fascism. Neither social system could be based upon women's emancipation, for the independant organization of women always posed a threat to their existence.

However, during periods of social and political upheaval, the ideas of women's liberation were reborn. During the Spanish civil war and revolution of 1936, for example, ideas about women were changed. Women, as could be expected, were involved in the social tumult, whether as peasants seizing the land or as workers taking over the major cities of Barcelona. Yet the Spanish revolution was betrayed by the Communist Party and crushed by the fascists. With it, hopes for women's liberation were crushed as well.

George Orwell, an Englishman who went to Spain to fight for the Republic, wrote about how the destruction of the revolution affected women:

"There were perhaps a thousand men at the barracks and a score or so of women, apart from militia men's wives who did the cooking. There were still women serving in the militias,

though not very many. In early battles they had fought side by side with the men as a matter of course. It is a thing that seems natural in a time of revolution. Ideas were changing, however. The militia men had to be kept out of the school while the women were drilling there because they laughed at the women and put them off. A few months ago, no one would have seen anything comic in a woman handling a gun.'' (12)

In the United States, during the momentous working class upheaval of the 30s, the organizing of the CIO, a feminist spark ignited as working class women played a role in winning the major battles of the CIO.

During the Flint sit-down strike against General Motors in 1937, women, led by a socialist, Genora Johnson, formed the Women's Emergency Brigade. They consciously decided not to form a ladies auxiliary but rather an organization of their own to help the men with their strike.

During one of the occupations when both women and men were sitting in the plant, the union ordered the women to leave the plants and to work for the union in the kitchen. Some of the women refused and marched off to the picket lines instead.

For these women, the experience in the class struggles gave rise to an embryonic feminist consciousness. ''I've found a common understanding and unselfishness I'd never known before in my life,'' said the wife of a striking Cadillac worker. ''I'm living for the first time with a definite goal. Just being a woman isn't enough any more. I want to be a human being with the right to think for myself.'' ''A new type of woman was born in the strike,'' exulted one of the women's leaders. ''Women, who only yesterday were horrified at unionism, who felt inferior to the task of organizing, speaking and leading, have overnight become the spearhead of the battle of unionism.''

The momentum of the CIO organizing campaigns was broken by the second imperialist world war. While hundreds and thousands of women entered industry druing the war, the climate of patriotism, and then McCarthyism of the 50s, was not conducive to feminism.

Women felt the brunt of the conservative 50s. During the Second World War, millions of women worked in factories, and while the work was hard, and often brutal, they found greater satisfaction there than just being trapped in the home. After

the war ended, women were forced out of work, quite often against their will, in order to provide employment for the returning soldiers. The reason women had to be forcibly sent from the factory to the kitchen, was that the government and employers felt that anything else would have created chaos in the employment situation as well as undermined hopes for post-war stability. Policy makers were terrified that the end of the war might bring back the depression, since it was only the war which had ended it.

In order to justify forcing women out of industry, all the institutions of the state created the new type of woman. In the 40s, the national heroine had been "Rosie the Riveter"—the aggressive and independent working woman. In the 50s, the radio, TV, and advertising, as well as teachers, psychiatrists, ministers and social workers extolled the "virtues" of this new woman. The American woman was happiest in the kitchen baking bread, sewing curtains and having babies. Her life revolved around her house, husband and family. She had no independent life of her own.

Working women with families were labeled as unfit mothers because they left their homes to work. Quite often, women who had careers of their own were branded as being castrators of men or women afflicted with "penis envy." And, because there was no women's liberation movement, it was impossible for women to counter-act the assault.

WOMEN'S LIBERATION

In the mid-nineteen sixties, the women's liberation movement was reborn. Like the earlier feminist movement, women's liberation emerged during a period of social turmoil—opposition to the war in Vietnam, the black liberation struggle and the radical stu-

dent movement. Women played leading roles in all these movements, and therefore it was not surprising to find women's consciousness and activities on the rise.

In the United States, the women's liberation movement came from three sources. One was well educated, upper middle class white women, many of them professionals, who wanted to participate more fully in capitalist society and on a more equal basis with men. These women had the talents and skills to be bankers, lawyers, doctors or college professors. However, they were excluded from the professions because of male chauvinism. Under the leadership of Betty Friedan, author of **The Feminine Mystique**, these women founded the National Organization for Women (NOW) in 1966, and later, in 1971, the National Women's Political Caucus.

NOW represented reform feminism. Its members wanted to tinker with some aspects of the system so they could have greater rights and representation. They were not interested in building a mass women's movement. Rather, they looked to the courts, Congress, governmental agencies, like the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission (EEOC), and the Democratic Party as the institutions that would grant women's rights—all of these institutions are controlled by men.

A second source for the women's movement was the "daughters" of these professional women. These women in the late sixties were involved in the civil rights, anti-war and student movements. The problems they faced with men in these movements, combined with the understanding that even with a diploma from an elite college, they would be asked if they could type when seeking jobs, led them to form the thousands of radical women's liberation groups across the country.

These women were radicalized in the fight for women's rights, often looking to the ideas of Marxists and revolutionary feminists. They reintroduced the idea that only through the self-activity of women and a mass working class women's liberation movement could the struggle for women's liberation be won. Furthermore, many of these women were or became socialists. They argued that women's liberation was a key part in the struggle for socialism. The women of the sixties, like their sisters in the past, demonstrated, picketed, marched, even went to jail for women's rights. These women also reintroduced the ideas of revolutionary

Fannie Lou Hamer

feminism back into the tiny Marxist movement. In the sixties, they introduced the idea of Gay Liberation into the women's movement. Sexual politics became a part of the understanding of capitalism.

A final source for the women's movement of the sixties was black women. While in the beginning most black women did not consciously identify themselves with the women's movement, they were a source of inspiration for millions of women. More importantly, their activities pointed the way for women's liberation. It was Rosa Parks' refusal to sit on the back of the bus which sparked off the Montgomery bus boycott. Women such as Fannie Lou Hamer, Gloria Richardson and Ruby Doris Smith Robinson played leading roles in building the civil rights movement. In 1964, Ruby Robinson, the chief field organizer for the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), presented a position paper entitled "The Position of Women in SNCC." To this, a leading figure in the civil rights movement, Stokely Carmichael, responded by saying that "the position of women in the movement is prone." In response to the sexism shown to black women in struggle, Robinson coined the phrase, "women's liberation."

In 1970, thousands of women—black and white—marched through the streets of New Haven demanding the immediate release of all members of the Black Panther Party. In 1971, the campaign to free Angela Davis became a symbol for women's liberationists. In 1975, again, the women's movement united to demand the release of Joann Little, a black woman charged with murdering her jailor who had raped her. The Joann Little case brought up the issues of racism and rape. It was the women's movement and the civil rights movement which were responsible for her acquittal—an important victory for all women—black and white.

In its first years, the women's movement was primarily middle class. But after 1968, slowly an increasing number of working class women got involved. In 1968 trade union women working at the Fiberboard Corporation in Antioch, California formed Women Inc. In 1971, Union Women's Alliance to Gain Equality (Union W.A.G.E.) was founded to involve trade union women in the struggle for women's rights. Since the seventies, a whole range of working women's organizations, like Women Office Workers, Nine to Five, the Coalition of Labor Union Women,

Twelve to One and Cleveland Women Working have developed to deal with problems of working women.

Increasingly since the early seventies, working women have been involved in fighting sexual discrimination. This fight ranges from suits against unequal pay, sexual harassment, to attempts to get into the male dominated industries and union apprenticeship programs. There have also been numerous strikes and struggles involving women. The Farah and Oneita textile strikes which involved Chicana and Black women, and the more recent strike at Essex Wire show the capacity of working women to wage militant struggles for union recognition, better wages and working conditions. The bitterly fought Brookside strike in Harlan County, Kentucky in 1973 was joined by women who organized the Brookside Women's Club to help the men win their strike. The women picketed, fought scabs and even went to jail. Partly as a result of the women's dedication and heroism, the miners won. In their struggle, they too discovered the ideas of women's liberation.

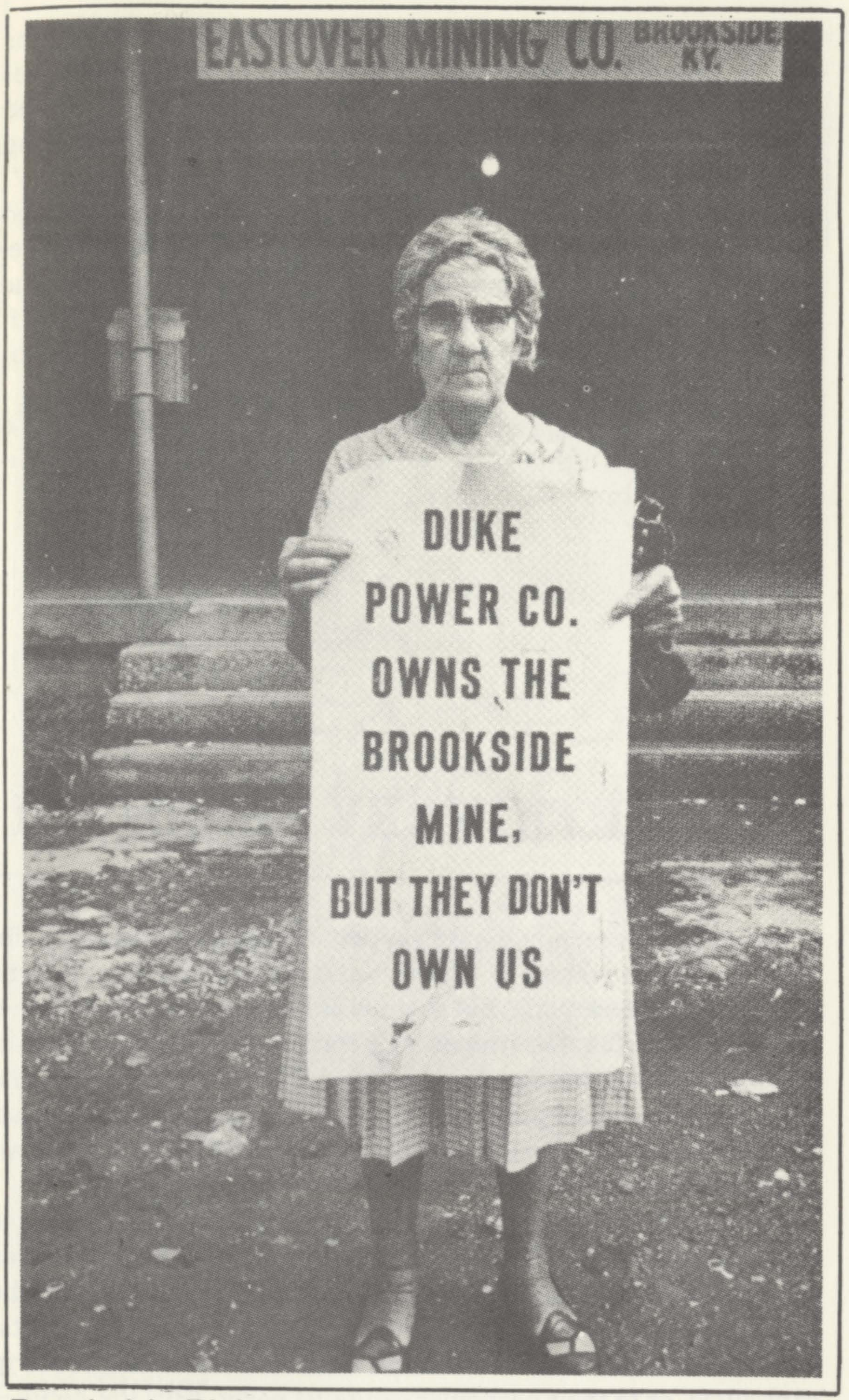
Today the economic situation in the United States is slowly deteriorating. Women, and especially black and hispanic women, are hit the hardest in terms of unemployment, job discrimination, working conditions and wages. A new working women's movement must be built and today's struggles are the first steps.

Now, in the 1970s, with the beginnings of a new workers' movement both in America and throughout the world, the possibilities for a new revolutionary feminist movement exist.

The fight for freedom for women is not confined to America. Today we see throughout the capitalist world, a developing women's liberation movement, and there have even been some flickers from the Stalinist countries.

In England, the women's liberation movement was sparked off by actions of working women. In 1969, hundreds of women who worked for Ford went on strike for equal pay and job opportunities. Their courage, militancy and determination paid off. They won almost all of their demands.

Two years later the unionization drive of cleaning women gave added life to the women's movement. The first women's liberation demonstration since the days of the suffragettes was led by May Hobbs of the cleaning women on International Women's Day in 1972.



Brookside Picket

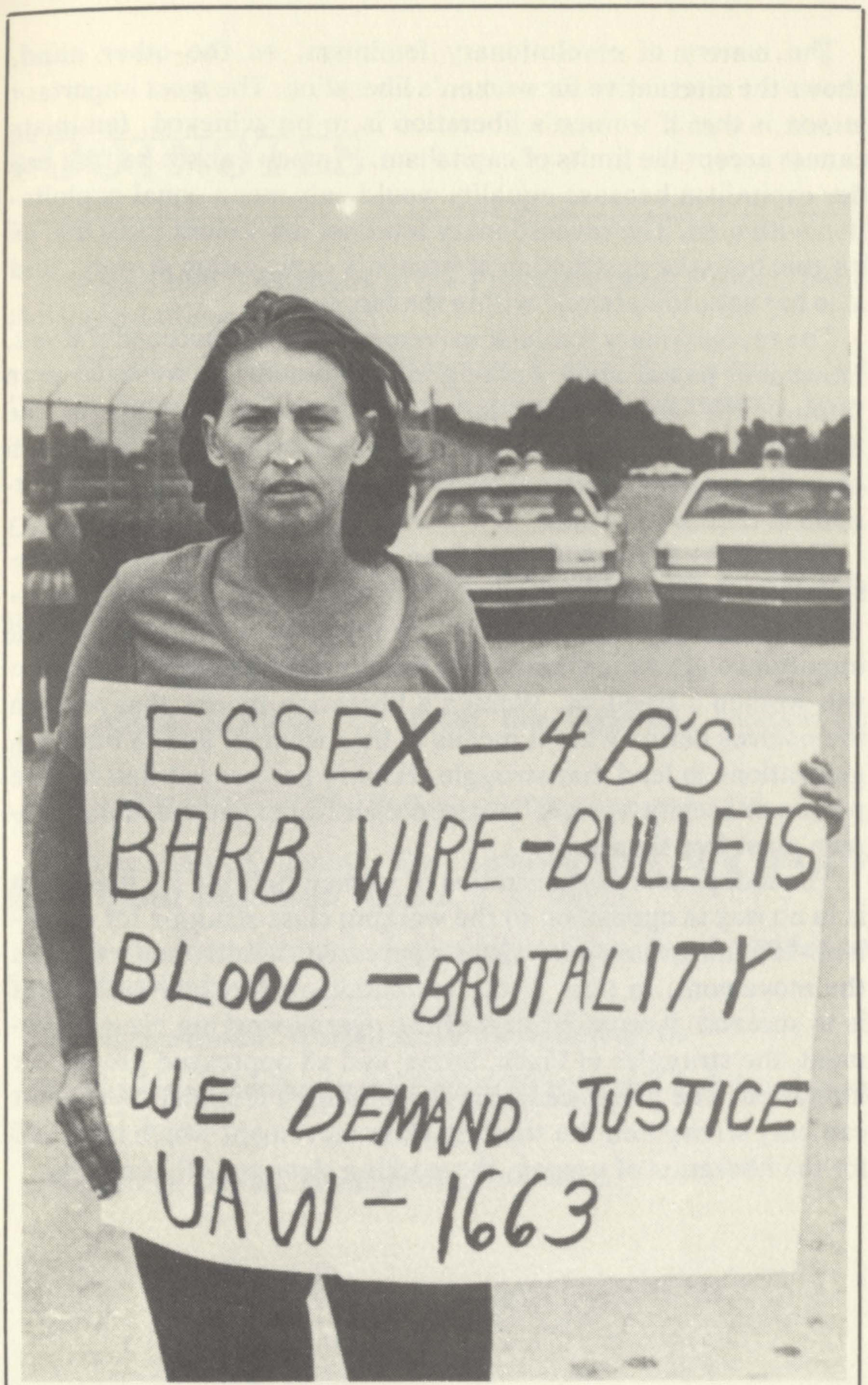
There are indications of feminist activities in other countries as well. In France in 1968, working women and students raised demands for child care and abortion. As the Russian tanks moved into Prague, also in 1968, workers and students were distributing Alexandra Kollontai's pamphlet "Communism and the Family." The Irish fight against British imperialism has also sparked women's consciousness in both the north and sough; most recently, Irish women have won both an equal pay fight and the legalization of contraceptives. In Poland in December 1970, it housewives joining with dockers who fought the Polish ruling class.

The most recent happenings have also been in underdeveloped countries such as Ethiopia, where during mass strikes and student activities, there were campaigns for equal pay.

REVOLUTIONARY FEMINISM

Millions of women and men support the ideas of women's liberation and are willing in various ways to fight for them. Some progress has been made, but there is still a great deal to be done. It is important that the women's liberation movement be rebuilt; and that it have a strategy that can emancipate women. We must learn from the mistakes as well as from the triumphs of the past. It took women 200 years to win the right to vote. We cannot wait another 200 years for our freedom.

One important lesson from the past is that reform feminism is doomed to failure. The Suffrage movement, for example, was committed to saving capitalism; they placed their faith in the Democratic and Republican Parties as a way to win their rights. This led them to subordinate women's liberation to the needs of capitalism, or to their particular capitalist party.



Essex Striker

The history of revolutionary feminism, on the other hand, shows the alternative for women's liberation. The most important lesson is that if women's liberation is to be achieved, feminists cannot accept the limits of capitalism. Women cannot be free under capitalism because equality would only mean equal exploitation with men. The revolutionary feminist movement must see as its goal both the destruction of women's exploitation at work, and also her subordinate role within the family.

The revolutionary feminist movement can only succeed if it is a movement based upon working class women. As we have seen through the struggles of the East London Federation of the Suffragettes, or women in the Xhenodetl, working class women have the potential power to transform the ideas of women's liberation to their own needs.

The history of revolutionary feminism shows the inter-relationship between revolutionary feminism and the revolutionary working class struggle for socialism. At the same time, it shows the importance of women's self-organization and activity as a way to win women's freedom. Women's liberation means that women themselves define what it means to be a woman, and to build organizations to lead that struggle. History has proved that no one person or society "grants" women their rights and freedom. Women must free themselves.

The independent organization of women fighting for liberation is in no way in opposition to the working class struggle for socialism. Like all movements of the oppressed, it adds and enriches the movement. In turn, if the revolutionary feminist movement is to succeed, it must be part of the overall working class movement, the struggles of black, brown and all oppressed groups for liberation. The presence of the revolutionary feminist movement can only strengthen the working class movement which must act for the liberation of women, the working class and all humanity.

FOOTNOTES

1. Page Smith, **Daughters of the Promised Land**, Boston, Little Brown and Company, p. 143.

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3. Phillip Foner, **A History of the Labor Movement in the United States,** Vol. I, p. 96.

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8. Alexandra Kollontai, **The Autobiography of a Sexually Emancipated Communist Woman,** p. 13 and 15.

9. Quote from Rudolph Schlesinger, **Changing Attitudes in Soviet Russia,** p. 49.

10. Jessica Smith, **Women in Soviet Russia,** p. 16.

11. Quoted in Rowbotham, **Women: Resistance and Revolution,** p. 149.

12. George Orwell, **Homage to Catalonia,** p. 7.

APPENDIX: WOMEN IN CHINA

Before the development of a revolutionary movement in China, the position of women was best expressed in a poem by Fu Hsuan:

How sad it is to be a woman
Nothing on earth is held so cheap.
Boys stand leaning at the door
Like Gods fallen out of heavens.
Their hearts brace the Four Oceans
The wind and dust of a thousand miles.
No one is glad when a girl is born,
By her the family sets no store.

A woman in China was no better than a slave. Bride price and wife selling were normal. So was polygamy and concubinage. Young girls were often kidnapped and sold into prostitution. All women were subject to the authority of husbands, fathers, brothers and ultimately sons. It is not surprising that female infanticide was common, especially among the poor. Women were an expense to raise. Later in life they would need a dowry to marry and most of their productive years were devoted to the servicing not of her own but of her husband's family.

The binding of Chinese women's feet symbolized the barbarity of Chinese civilization. The custom was most prevalent among the upper classes and its function was expressed in the Chinese proverb, "Feet are bound not to make them beautiful as a curved bow, but to restrain women when they go out of doors." The binding process which began in childhood was excruciatingly

painful and ended with permanent crippling.

The impact of western imperialism in the late 1800's began to weaken the authoritarian patriarchal structure of China. With the growth of industry there was a rapid increase in the urban population. The need for cheap sources of labor in the cities led to the employment of women. Footbinding, which obviously prevented women's participation in industry slowly fell from favor. Educational opportunities existed for a handful of women, however.

In the early years of the twentieth centuries women's organizations were founded. Women also played a leading role in building trade unions. From 1910 until 1912, women textile workers in Shanghai went out on strike 20 times!

In the 1900-1912 period there was a struggle against Japanese and western imperialism and for women's rights. Women were very much involved. At the same time, there was a growing communist movement which also took up the issues of women's rights.

In 1912, when the Republic was proclaimed, a group of women stormed Parliament smashing windows and injuring guards in protest against inequality.

In China, there was a massive revolutionary feminist movement that was part of a socialist working class upheaval in the period from 1900-1927. But the brutal defeat of the socialist movement in 1927 by Chang Kai-Shek ended the revolutionary feminist movement as well—the two went hand in hand.

After the defeat of the working class in China, Mao Tse Tung and the Chinese Communist Party continued their struggle. However, their fight was not for the emancipation of the Chinese working class and international workers' revolution, but for the national independence of China. Women's liberation was subordinated, but nevertheless, the success of Mao in 1948 in creating an independent state capitalist regime had important ramifications for women.

In many respects, the position of women in China since 1948 is similar to that of women during the early stages of capitalist development in Europe. The difference is that China is state capitalist. Decisions such as whether or not women go into agriculture or industry, distribution of contraception, and the extent of child care are not made by individuals, but by the

Chinese Communist Party. These decisions are made not in the interests of Chinese women for their emancipation, but in the interest of the Chinese state and its accumulation—so it can industrialize and compete with the other capitalist powers—Russia, Japan, the United States.

Inequality between working women and men can also be found in the commune system. According to one recent visitor to China, Norma Diamond, "In the brigade-run embroidery shop the women workers' points and earnings are determined not by the market value of what the shop produces, but what the husbands' or fathers' team accords them. These women earn between 6½ and 9 points a day, but never a full 10 points (the highest number).

Recent visitors to China also notice that there are very few if any women in administrative or management positions.

Volunteer work—unpaid labor—is prevalent in China. Again, volunteer work is primarily female. In 1957, the Women's Federation mobilized parents to hold afternoon classes when the hours of regular schools were cut back from 8 to 4 hours. Cutbacks had reduced the numbers of teachers. In 1971 and 1972, the Sidels, a professional couple visiting China, noticed that married women in one out of 14 households did free work in the public health sector. In 1973, visitors' reports indicate that urban primary schools are run almost exclusively for free by married women.

Perpetuation of sex roles in employment is also evident. Women predominate in the teaching of lower grades. The higher up the educational ladder one goes, the smaller the percentage of women gets. At Peking University there are 1,487 men and 646 women on the faculty. These figures show that in the most prestigious university and in the highest paid jobs, most employed are men.

The People's Liberation Army, PLA, plays a major role in the economic and political life of China. PLA members hold high administrative positions in virtually every area of Chinese life. The fact that women have no significant role in the PLA bars them from equality and leadership in all areas of Chinese life.

In the family, the sex determination of roles is most evident. The Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars reported that everywhere in China they asked about who cooked, cleaned house,

took care of children, shopped, did the sewing. The answer was almost universal, "The wife, of course."

There is great underrepresentation of women in politics as well. Less than 10% of the CCP is women. At the Tenth Party Congress in August 1973, no women were elected to the Political Bureau standing committee. At the Central Committee, created at the Eleventh Congress in August, 1977, there were only 14 women full members out of 201, and 24 alternative members of 132 total. There are no women on the Politburo.

Finally, in the area of contraception, abortion and sexuality, the policies of the CCP have been dictated not upon the needs of the women, but on the needs of the state with regard to industrialization and population planning. Chinese society is very puritanical. Many sympathizers of Chinese society claim that puritanism is part of the attempt by Chinese women to demand respect for themselves. But there is another side to this problem. Puritanism historically has been used against women. Women's sexuality is repressed while men are allowed to have socially sanctioned sexual outlets.

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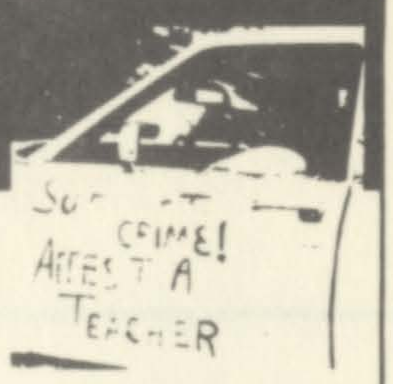

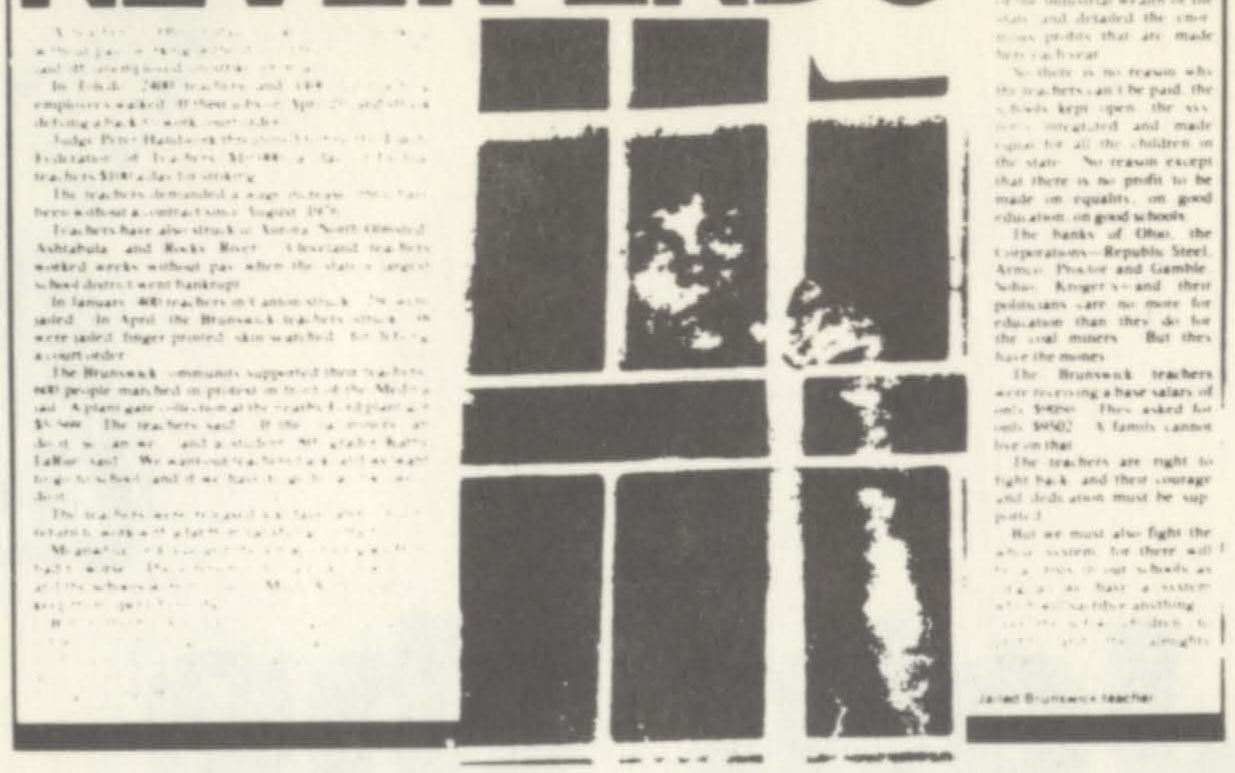

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